BOB DEXTER
and the
Beacon Beach Mystery

By

WILLARD F. BAKER

60

HIS FEET WERE WASHED BY THE ANGRY FOAM-CRESTED BREAKERS.

Bob Dexter, Beacon Beach Mystery *Page 36*

BOB DEXTER AND THE BEACON BEACH MYSTERY

OR

The Wreck of the Sea Hawk

By

WILLARD F. BAKER

Author of "Bob Dexter and the Club House Mystery," "The Boy Ranchers," "The Boy Ranchers on the Trail," etc.

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BOOKS BY WILLARD F. BAKER

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BOB DEXTER AND THE BEACON BEACH MYSTERY
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BOB DEXTER AND THE BEACON BEACH MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

STORM SWEPT

"WELL, boys, I wish you luck, but I'm afraid you're in for a bad night of it!"

Jerry Tonk, an old seaman of a bygone generation, rubbed together his gnarled hands, scarred by many a battle with the wind and waves, and spoke to his ancient horse which started off down the sandy hill, drawing after him a rattling wagon.

"Bad night of it, what do you mean, Mr. Tonk?" asked Bob Dexter, as he gazed about on the piles of camping stuff which his two companions, Harry Pierce and Ned Fuller, were trying to straighten out. "Are the mosquitoes bad here?"

"If they are, we have plenty of mosquito netting," broke in Ned. "I thought of *that*—got to hand it to me, all right."

"You can have the honor of draping some over my cot when the beastly pests begin biting," remarked Harry, with a grin.

"No, 'tisn't mosquitoes I'm meaning," went on Jerry Tonk, the local expressman of Beacon Beach. He gazed up at the sky, the afternoon blue of which was flecked here and there with fleecy clouds. "But we're in for a storm, and a bad one, too, or I'll lose my guess."

"Storm!" cried Bob. "The weather never looked better to me. How do you tell—does your pet corn ache?" and he laughed, though he was respectful enough toward the odd character.

Jerry Tonk did not seem to consider the question impertinent. He grinned good-naturedly, chuckled once or twice and picked up a bit of seaweed that had been blown up on the knoll where the three boys had decided to pitch their tent for a stay in camp. The weed was limp in the hands of the old man, and something seemed to tell Bob that it ought to have been dry and brittle—as is most seaweed when it has been for any length of time out of its native element.

"That's how I tell, lads," he said. "The seaweed's as limp as wet rope-end. 'Cause why, you ask me?"

He paused. No one had asked him the question, but he considered that they had, and, really, the boys were anxious to know how it was that the old seaman predicted a storm. It might mean a great deal to them—their first night in camp.

"'Cause why," went on Jerry Tonk, "'cause

there's too much moisture in the air—that's why. It means that the glass is falling—I'll show you if you want to come down to my cabin. I don't depend on my corns—haven't got any, as a matter of fact—but we're in for a blow—you mark my words!"

He gazed aloft again, as, doubtless he had done many a time when on the heaving deck of some craft, alone on the great ocean, and again spoke to his horse, which had halted after its first movement.

"Better make everything snug," he went on. "When it comes on to blow at Beacon Beach it sure does blow. And you're in a good place to feel it. If you'd taken my advice you'd 'a' pitched your camp lower down."

"And then we'd miss all the cool breezes," spoke Bob. "We'll take a chance up here, Mr. Tonk. But we'll make everything snug, as you advise."

"Yep—you'd better," and with this parting bit of advice the old salt drove off down the sandy road which led from the stunted pine-covered knoll, which the lads had selected as their camping site, to the small fishing village of Beacon Beach, located on the rocky stretch of the New England coast.

"Whew! I'm about ready to eat!" exclaimed Ned, as he took his seat on a pile of boxes. "Don't let me influence either of you," he went on, "but I feel a bit hungry—if it's only to nibble at some crackers and dried herring."

"It's too early to eat!" said Harry. "We had a good dinner in the village."

"Good—yes—what there was of it," admitted Ned. "But that was hours ago. I say, let's eat a bit and——"

"No, Harry's right!" broke in Bob. "It's much too early to eat again. Besides, we ought to get things in shape against that storm."

"Pooh! Rats! Do you believe what that old codger said?" asked Ned.

"He ought to know," declared Harry. "Besides —look at the flags at the life saving station."

He pointed down the beach to where, about half a mile away, was the squatty, weather-beaten building of the United States Coast Guard. At one corner of the small house (part of which sheltered the captain and his crew of men, as well as providing a safe place for the surf boat, the breeches buoy apparatus and the like) was a tall tower. In this was stationed a lookout who kept vigil over the sea and coast. And from this tower there now fluttered several flags, one a triangular one of blue, below a square of white with a red center.

"Well, what's the answer?" asked Ned, who was inspecting several boxes, with the evident desire of discovering one containing food.

"That blue triangular flag, below the other, means a fall in temperature," said Harry. "The other flag indicates a storm. If there was to be fair weather

the flag would be white. There's a blow coming, all right. The weather bureau has sent out word of it."

"And Jerry Tonk's seaweed bears it out!" laughed Bob. "You're outvoted two to one, Ned, so fall to and help get up the tent and then we can think of eating."

"Oh—all right," assented the hungry one. "I'm always willing to give in to the majority."

The others laughed—they always got along well together, and then, for a time, they were so busy there was little time to talk. For it is no small matter to make camp, even if you have done it several times before, and especially must it be well done in the face of a coming storm.

And that a storm was brooding the boys were certain of as the afternoon waned. The sun lost its brightness, and the sky its deep blue, while more clouds continued to gather.

However, our friends were no fair weather sailors —a storm did not worry them, though they wanted to be in the best shape—as regards camp equipment —to meet it.

Accordingly the tent was put up with care, and the pegs for the guy ropes were driven in extra deep, while many additional ropes were put in place.

"We'd better do that because we're in rather an exposed position," said Bob, who seemed to be the natural leader. "And when it comes on to rain, as

it looks as if it might, we'll have to loosen the ropes so they won't shrink and pull out the tent pegs."

Many an otherwise well-established camp has been ruined from lack of this simple precaution—that of loosening the tent ropes in a rain, for water shrinks and shortens the ropes, and then they exert such a drawing power on the pegs that the wooden pins are pulled from the earth, and the tent collapses.

Perhaps the warning of the coming storm caused the three lads to exert unusual energy, or perhaps Ned wanted to hurry through the preliminary work so that he might eat. But in what was almost record-breaking time the tent was erected, the cots in place, the oil stove was set up and camp had been fairly made, though much remained to do in order to make it conform to the best ideas of the lads.

"There, I reckon this'll do for a time," remarked Bob, as he sat down on one of the folding stools, with which the place was equipped. "There'll be plenty for us to do to-morrow, but I guess we can stand a pretty hard blow now—if one comes."

"Oh, one is sure to come," remarked Ned, as he put the coffee pot on the stove, and dropped some slices of bacon in the frying pan. "Didn't old Tonk's seaweed say so?" and he chuckled.

"Maybe you'll laugh on the other side of your mouth when you wake up in the middle of the night and have to sit on your hair to keep it from blowing away," commented Harry.

"Or help hold the tent down," added Bob.

"And maybe hold an umbrella over my bed to keep the rain off," went on Harry.

"I think I see myself doing *that!*" scornfully declaimed Ned. "Besides, this tent isn't going to leak."

"Not in a year!" declared Bob. "The tent and the fly are waterproof—I saw to that."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Harry. "Well, now we're here let's forget that there ever was such a thing as a school, and lay out to enjoy ourselves. Me for a swim before we eat!"

"I'm with you!" cried Bob. "Come on, Ned, turn the stove off and we'll get supper later."

"No, you fellows go in for a dip, if you like. I'll get the supper this time—somebody else can rustle the grub for breakfast. But I'm hungry."

"I'll be a heap sight hungrier when I come up out of those waves!" cried Harry, pointing down below, where the surf was pounding on the sandy beach.

"You said it!" chimed in Bob.

In less than two minutes the lads had disrobed and donned their bathing suits, and soon were diving through the breakers. If Ned envied them, and repented of his self-imposed task, he gave no sign of it, and when, a little later, the dripping ones came sprinting up the sandy knoll, where the camp had been made, they found a supper of eggs and bacon,

with coffee, jam and other "fixings" waiting for them.

"Bully for you, Ned!" cried Harry, drying himself, and hastily donning as few garments as would serve his purpose of sitting down to the folding table, now laden with supper.

"You get the fur-lined bathtub for a prize as a good boy!" added Bob Dexter.

"Oh, shut up and eat!" good-naturedly cried Ned.

Then, for a time, little was said, but much was done, as the empty dishes testified. Then came a delightful period of sitting about with every want satisfied, pending making arrangements for the night.

"You won't have much chance for detective work around here, Bob," remarked Harry, as he arose and luxuriously stretched after a period of resting.

"Don't want any of it," was the quick comment. "I came here to rest."

"Guess you had enough solving the mystery of the Golden Eagle; didn't you?" inquired Ned.

"Huh! That was more luck than any real detective work!" declared Bob. "Anyhow, let's talk about something else." Young Dexter was very modest about his accomplishment, as you shall see.

"Talk about the storm," suggested Ned. "Do you really think we'll have one?"

"There are a lot of clouds up there, anyhow," spoke Bob, with a motion toward the sky. "Not a

star in sight." The boys were sitting in the darkness in front of the tent. No lantern was lighted, as it would attract moths and bugs, to say nothing of possible mosquitoes. Every so often the camp was brilliantly illuminated, but for a second only, by a bright flash from the Beacon Beach lighthouse.

"The sea seems to be rising," observed Harry, during a period of silence. "The surf is louder."

It undoubtedly was, and, after listening to this critically for a few moments, Bob remarked:

"Yes, there's a storm on the way, all right. I say, let's turn in and get some sleep before we're routed out. It's so warm we won't need much in the way of bed clothes."

Their tent was a large one, the front part serving as a dining room and kitchen, while the rear part, divided off by a canvas curtain, was the bedroom, holding three cots.

A little later three tired, sleepy, healthy lads were stretched out on their small canvas beds, "pounding their ears," as Ned spoke of it afterward.

But if the three lads were thus quiet, all about them was an ever-increasing tumult of nature. The heaving sea seemed to encroach farther up the beach, and the waves, small at first, became larger, until many a fisherman, who had left his craft on the shingle, began to wonder if he had pulled her far enough up to be out of reach of the high tide. And the wind, which had come only in gentle puffs early

in the evening, began to blow more steadily, and with greater force, until it swayed the tent.

It was midnight, or perhaps later, when the storm actually broke, and it did this with an almost tropical fury. The sky seemed to open and rain was spilled out as water is tipped from a bucket.

For a time, however, the boys in their well set-up tent slept so soundly that they heard neither the wind nor the rain, nor were they aware of the swaying of their canvas shelter.

At last, however, Bob Dexter began to dream that he was on a ship, sailing a tempestuous sea, while the captain, an old man like Jerry Tonk, kept shouting:

"Get off my corn! Get off my corn!"

Bob felt himself being pitched overboard, and awakened with a start, to find Ned standing over him, shaking him, and tilting his cot to awaken him, while the lad was shouting in his ear:

"Do you hear that horn? Do you hear that horn?"

In an instant Bob was fully awake, and sat up, to become aware of the fierce storm that was sweeping over them. He saw that Harry had switched on one of the portable electric torches they carried, and Ned was getting a raincoat out from a pile of garments in the corner where they had been thrown.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob, sleepily.

"It's raining cats and dogs and blowing great

guns!" announced Ned. "Got to loosen the tent ropes, I reckon. I thought I'd never get you awake. Hear that horn?"

Bob then connected this question with his dream and the cry of the old captain to "get off his corn."

Through the night, and above the roar and swish of the storm, could be heard a strange sound—coming out of the sea, it appeared.

"That isn't a horn!" cried Bob. "It's a boat's whistle. She's close in shore, too, to judge by the sound. Maybe it's a wreck! Come on, fellows!"

He leaped from his cot and began fumbling for some garments. The wailing of the boat's whistle—if such it was—sounded more plainly during a lull in the wind. Then came a booming sound.

"Distress guns!" cried Bob. "It's a wreck, all right!"

And, though he little guessed it at the time, there was soon to come an opportunity for him to use his peculiar gift and talent as an amateur detective.

CHAPTER II

ROCKETS IN THE NIGHT

MAKING sure that their tent ropes were sufficiently loosed, to compensate for the rain that was falling, and leaving it as securely closed as was possible, the three boys, attired in oilskins, fought their way out into the storm and darkness.

There was plenty of both storm and darkness, and the latter was the thing that impressed itself most on the boys. For within the tent they had the advantage of the glow of their dependable electric flashlights. These they stuck in their pockets as they went out, and it seemed that they were up against a solid wall of blackness—thick and heavy. For in Beacon Beach there were no street lamps. An occasional oil lamp, stuck on an old wooden post here and there, served to give what little illumination was needed by the fishermen. And even these feeble lights were out now—extinguished by the fierce wind, it would seem.

"Even the lighthouse has gone dark!" cried Ned, as he stumbled along beside Bob, clutching the latter's arm now and then to save himself from falling.

"The lighthouse dark—no!" cried Harry. "That shouldn't be! It's supposed to be alight all the while."

"Well, it isn't!" declared Ned. "There hasn't been a flash from it since we came out."

"That's right—there hasn't," murmured Bob. "Something must have happened. And in this storm—a ship out there—it's bad business!"

"Did you see a ship?" demanded Harry, almost losing his breath as he opened his mouth to speak, for the wind blew directly down his throat, it seemed.

"She's out there!" cried Bob, pointing in the darkness toward the sound of the intermittent whistling, which Ned, at first, had mistaken for a horn.

"Look! There's goes a rocket!" shouted Harry. "Signals of distress, all right. She must have struck on Shark Rock!"

"Guess you're right!" murmured Ned. "There'll be work for the life savers now, all right. There goes another rocket!"

The darkness was suddenly made brilliant, though but for a few, brief seconds, by the ghastly glare of signal rockets in the night—rockets sent up by a ship in deadly peril.

"It's queer about that lighthouse going dark," murmured Bob, as he stumbled on beside his companions. They were making their way down the knoll on which they had pitched their tent—down to the beach—intending to go to the life saving sta-

tion to watch the men of the coast guard at work. It was the near end of summer, and the beginning of fall storms, and the last of the men had returned from their summer vacations, during which time the coast guard stations are only partially manned.

"Mighty strange about the lighthouse going dark," murmured Bob again. "It's queer that anything like this should happen."

It was queer—and more than queer—it was mysterious, and likely to prove fatal, perhaps, should it develop that a ship had gone on Shark Rock because of the extinguishing of the beacon in the tall tower.

Shark Rock was a dangerous ledge, about a quarter mile off shore, and was named not only for its shape—like that of some gigantic shark—but because, at times, these uncanny fish swam around it—not the great tropical, man-eating sharks, it is true, but big enough, though some sailors called them only dogfish.

"But there's a light on Shark Rock!" declared Ned, for he and his chums had found out things about Beacon Beach before coming to it to camp, and they knew about the lighthouse, the life-saving station, Shark Rock and other points of interest. "That light ought to have warned a ship away."

"If it didn't blow out same as the lighthouse beacon did," said Bob. "Whew! This is a storm, all right!"

Indeed it was—the wind whipping the rain into the faces of the boys with stinging force—the driven drops seeking out openings in their oilskins and forcing the water through to their very skin. But little they minded that! There was tragedy stalking abroad in the darkness—the wreck of a ship and the possible loss of lives. Though the rescue work was already under way, they knew, still it might not be in time, or the sea might be so furious that even the breeches buoy would be of little avail.

And that the life savers were "on the job," as Ned called it, was evidenced by what the lads saw soon after reaching the level beach.

"There goes an answering rocket!" cried Bob, as a blue flare from the location of the headquarters of the coast guard shed a weird light on the rain-pelted and wind-lashed waves that were tumbling on the sands.

"We're just in time to help them," commented Harry.

"Guess they won't need our help," remarked Ned. "There go some of the fishermen—they can handle a boat better in the surf than we could."

"Reckon you're right," spoke Bob. "But they won't put out any boat in those waves!"

He pointed, as he spoke, just as another flare from the coast guard men illuminated the sea, and gave the boys a view of such a maelstrom of tum-

bling, angry water that they felt a sense of fear clutching their hearts.

"Have to shoot a line and pull the men from the wreck ashore," declared Ned. "Though how they're going to do it in this blow is more than I can tell."

"Leave it to them," exclaimed Bob. "They know how!"

"We can watch them!" cried Harry. "Come on, or we may miss it!"

The lads had negotiated the not very easy descent from the knoll and were now walking along the beach in the teeth of a northeast storm that was whipping the crests of the big, salty waves into their faces, forming a saline coating on their lips. So strong was the wind, coming across the three thousand miles of open ocean, that, at times, the lads were almost actually stopped in their tracks.

"That's some breeze!" panted Ned, when a moment's respite gave them a chance to breathe freely.

"And to think of shooting a weighted line from a small cannon into the teeth of that gale," said Bob.

Yet such must the life savers do, since they could not, skillful and brave as they were, launch their boat through such surf as was now beating and pounding on the beach.

"More guns!" cried Ned, as again a signal boomed out from the direction of Shark Rock.

"And more flares!" added Bob.

"They must be getting desperate," added Harry.

"Guess you'd be, too, if your ship was on those rocks," declared Bob. "She can't last very long, pounding to pieces as she must be."

"There goes the lighthouse!" suddenly called Ned, as they were fighting their way down the beach. "Must have been something the matter with the light."

The flashing signal was again sending its tell-tale gleam across the storm-tossed waters, but too late, it would seem, to benefit the ship on the rocks. Or perhaps the craft may have been wrecked in spite of any aid the flashing light would have been to her.

"We'll hear more about this in the morning," spoke Ned. "We can go down to the lighthouse—they're open to the public, I've read."

Whatever had happened to the beacon, located to the south of the life saving house, it was now operating, the revolving lens breaking the steady glow of the powerful light up into flashes coming with regularity one to a second.

"With the lighthouse out of commission, and no light on Shark Rock, no wonder a ship is wrecked!" exclaimed Ned.

"How do you know there was no light on Shark Rock?" asked Bob.

"Oh, well, if there was a light there no ship would come close enough to be caught."

"You can't tell. Something may have happened to her machinery, or the rudder."

"That's right," agreed Harry. "But say, no very big ships come in this close to shore; do they, Bob?"

"No, only coasting vessels, and small ones at that, I guess. This one must have been off her course. We didn't figure on so much excitement on our first night in camp; did we?"

"I should say not!" cried his chums, and Ned added:

"There may be more than excitement before we get through."

"That's right," agreed Harry and Bob.

They knew the danger of some of the men from the wreck being drowned before the life savers could take them off.

And while the lads are battling their way through the storm, I will take just a moment to acquaint my new readers with something of the history of Bob Dexter, who is to be the hero of this story.

Bob was an orphan, living with his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Joel Dexter in the country town of Cliffside. Though Bob Dexter was a "regular" boy, he had some traits that were uncommon. He had a natural gift for solving mysteries, and in thus bringing about their solution he had

gained for himself the name of "detective." Bob, himself, did not care much for this title, since he thought it implied an association with criminals. But the finding of Jennie Thorp, who, it was supposed, had been kidnaped, had nothing criminal in it. And, in a measure, the mystery of the Golden Eagle was in the same class.

The first volume of this series, "Box Dexter and the Club House Mystery," gives the details of how Bob discovered who it was that had taken away the club's prized mascot. He and his two chums, Ned and Harry, were involved in some queer doings, and not a little danger. But in the end Bob was able to restore to his club the much valued trophy, though not exactly in the way he first designed.

While Bob Dexter had some of the qualifications for being a detective, there was still much for him to learn. He was young yet, and that, instead of being a handicap, was in his favor.

He had read and studied, as best he could, along the line that he had determined to make his life work, and, though he made mistakes, he had a habit of saying that he never made the same one twice.

He had worked hard on the mystery of the golden eagle, and had been in no little danger. His two chums, Ned and Harry, also had a part in the game, and with them Bob had divided the reward he received.

Following the strenuous work of solving this mystery, Bob and his chums had planned a fall camping trip to Beacon Beach, and they had no sooner arrived there than they were plunged into a storm and a wreck, and, had they but known it, a strange mystery was to follow close on the heels of this.

However, nothing of this sort now entered their heads as they trudged on through the storm to where, in the darkness, broken now and then by the glare of rockets, they could see a mass of men congregated on the sand. These were the life savers and their fisherman volunteer helpers.

"They're getting ready to fire the gun!" cried Bob.

"Hurry! We don't want to miss that!" added Ned.

They broke into a run, but Harry, who was in the lead, had not proceeded far before he uttered a cry, and, turning, while a rocket made light enough for them to see, his chums saw him prostrate on the beach, beside what seemed to be a dark bundle.

"Come here! Come here!" called Harry.

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE SAVERS

"WHAT's the matter—hurt yourself?" asked Bob, all thoughts of the wreck and the life savers gone from his mind, in the moment that he thought his chum in danger.

"What happened to Harry?" demanded Ned, who, some little distance ahead of Bob, had also looked back to see the prostrate lad near that black bundle on the sand.

"Don't know!" was Bob's reply. "He fell—or something—looks like a big fish there beside him." The almost constant glare of rockets now, added to the light from some long-burning flare ignited by the coast guard men, gave illumination to the scene.

"Maybe it's a shark!" cried Ned.

"Sharks aren't very dangerous—out of water," commented Bob, as he turned to hasten back to his friend. "And no lively shark would allow himself to be washed ashore unless he was almost dead."

However, Harry solved the mystery for his chums, even before they reached him, for he arose

from where he was kneeling (he had not fallen as they at first supposed) and cried:

"It's a man! He was washed in from the wreck, I guess!"

"Is he dead?" demanded Ned.

"Almost, I guess. We'd better get help!"

By this time Ned and Bob had reached the side of their chum. They saw him standing close to the body of a man—what sort of man, save that he had a black, bushy beard—they could not tell—there was not light enough for that, even with the flare now brightly burning at the breeches buoy post. Nor could it be told whether or not the castaway—for such he seemed to be—was alive.

The lads were in a quandary. They wanted to hurry to the scene of the life saving work and watch the skilled coast guard men at work. But it would not do to leave this unfortunate stranger at the mercy of the wind and tide. And at times the waves almost reached the motionless, prostrate body.

"We'll carry him farther up the beach," suggested Bob, "and then let some of the life savers. They'll know what to do."

"Good idea!" commented Harry.

They lifted the sodden body—very lifeless it seemed—and carried it farther up the shingle. It was no easy work, for the man was heavy, as most inert bodies are, and the footing was uncertain.

Added to this the wind and rain of the storm, which seemed to be increasing in fury, and you have the lads' task pictured for you.

However, they succeeded—as, indeed, they did in most things they undertook, and then, seeing that the man was in no danger from any waves, high as they might come, they rushed on toward the scene that attracted them.

"If he's been in the water long, and is 'most drowned, he'll need first aid treatment," said Ned, as he shuffled along.

"They can give it to him better than we can," said Bob. "They can put him on a cart, or something, and carry him to their house."

A few moments later the lads found themselves in the midst of an excited throng of fishermen and life savers. And yet, though there was excitement, there was also order and system. This was not the first vessel that had piled up on Shark Rock, and the veteran members of the coast guard station knew what they were about.

Already the squat little cannon, or, rather, mortar, was in place near the short, stumpy mast set deep in the sand. Beside the mortar was the box of line, the long, strong cord woven in and out among upright pegs, set in the bottom of the box, and so interlaced as to prevent the line from tangling and snarling as the iron shot took it through the air across the deck of the wreck.

While some men were preparing to make the shot, others were getting ready the ropes and canvas contrivance known as the breeches buoy. Its name gives a good description of it. Imagine a large pair of knickerbockers, or a Dutchman's breeches, with a sort of life preserver attached to the outside, and you have in mind what I am trying to describe to you. The person to be rescued sits in the breeches, actually puts them on, in fact, one leg through each hole. His arms go out over a cork ring. Then the life savers do the rest, as I shall tell you shortly.

Singling out, in the glare from the burning signal light, which neither rain nor wind could extinguish, the captain, Bob ran up to him and shouted:

"There's a man down the beach! He must have been washed in off the wreck!"

Bob pointed to where he and his chums had left the unfortunate man.

For a moment the captain of the life savers looked down on the boy who had addressed him. It was clear that the mind of Captain Hanford was nearly all on the work in hand—that of getting a line out to the wrecked vessel. Yet he must give heed to this news.

"What's that you say?" he shouted above the storm, making a sort of megaphone of his wet hands. "And who are you?"

"We're camping on Pine Hill," Bob answered, giving the name to the knoll, which name had been

imparted to the lads that afternoon by Jerry Tonk. "We came down the beach and stumbled on this man. We carried him up the beach."

"Oh, it's you boys—is it?" exclaimed another voice, and from the wind tossed and rain swept shadows stepped Jerry Tonk himself. "Well, what do you think of my prediction now?" he asked. "Didn't we git a storm? Regular rip-snorter!"

"You know these lads, Tonk?" demanded Captain Hanford, sharply. It was no time to talk of storm warnings that had been borne out.

"Yep! I know 'em! Took their camp stuff over to Pine Hill this arternoon!"

"All right. We'll look after this man," went on the captain, seemingly satisfied that the characters of his informants had been vouched for. "Abel, you and Jim walk back there and bring him to the station. Stand aside now, boys, we're going to shoot the line."

If Abel and Jim, whoever they were, had wished to stay and help in the more spectacular side of the rescue, they did not voice their wish. Instead, with a short: "Aye, aye, sir!" they marched off to where Bob directed them.

The boys had carefully laid the unconscious man down near a stunted and gnarled pine tree up amid the sand dunes—a tree that was a sufficient landmark, even in the storm and darkness, for them to describe it to the rescuers.

"I know just where it is," said one of the two men, later the boys getting to know him as Abel Short, while his companion was Jim Hart. "I often use that tree as a marker. We'll find him."

Satisfied that they had done their duty, and that they could now give their attention to watching the rescue work, the three lads now did this with their whole hearts. It was a novel sight to them, though once before, while at the seashore in a different place, they had seen the life guard go through the drill which is part of their duty.

This time, however, it was stern reality. Off there in the smothering waves that were pounding her to pieces, was a wreck, with souls on board that needed to be saved. And ready hands and stout hearts were proceeding to do this.

"Is all clear?" called the captain to his men.

"All clear!" came the answer.

Before this assurance could be given, however, much work had been done. At the first alarm—the blowing of the whistle, the firing of the distress gun and the sending up of rockets from the wreck—the men of the live saving station had gotten busy. The man patroling the beach had been the first to see the signal and hear the whistle. He had flashed his flare light to let those on board know that help was on the way. Then he had sped back to the station.

There the cart, with its broad wheels, to keep

it from sinking in the sand, had been rolled out, carrying the gun, the box of line and the breeches buoy apparatus.

Had the surf not been so heavy the motor boat (also on a broad-tired cart, to enable it to be run down the beach) would have been gotten out. But one look at the raging sea told Captain Hanford that it would be worse than useless to try and launch the small but sturdy craft.

Reaching the mast, set deep in the sand, which mast served to elevate and anchor the shore end of the life line, the work started in real earnest.

It must not be supposed that the permanent mast near the life saving station will serve for every wreck. Sometimes boats go ashore too far up or too far down the coast to allow the use of the mast. In that case "shears" are set up. These shears are two long, heavy pieces of wood, shaped as the name indicates, and the longer legs are braced in the sand. Through the top V-shaped opening the life line is passed, being anchored in the sand back of high water.

But knowing the danger of Shark Rock, the life mast had been set up to be in line with that and any vessel that might be impaled on the jagged, black teeth. Thus it was, in this case, that the permanent mast (which is always used in practice drills) was available.

"Stand clear!" cried the captain.

The long, cylindrical piece of iron—the shot, to a ring of which was attached the long, thin and strong line, had been put down the mouth of the mortar on top of the charge of powder.

This charge of powder was a matter which always gave the life savers much anxious thought.

Too heavy a charge would send the shot away beyond the ship—yes, it might even tear the shot loose from the line, involving a delay while another shot was rigged and the line recoiled.

Too light a charge would mean that the shot would fall short, dropping into the sea between the shore and the vessel. And this, also, meant delay.

Just the right amount of powder in the mortar and the long, iron shot would fall a short distance to windward of the stricken vessel—athwart her decks, so to speak, and into the sea on the other side. Indeed the best shot for the purpose would fall plumb on the ship's deck, there to be picked up.

But slightly across the deck was as good as on it, for the purpose of the life savers, for once the line was across the deck it could be hauled in by those aboard the wreck.

And that is what the light strong line was intended for—to be hauled in and on by those in distress. The line itself, as shot from shore to vessel, was not strong enough for any salvage purposes. But to the shotted line was bent, or fastened, another. Nor was this second one able to bear the brunt

of the sea storm. But by this second line there could be hauled out a strong hawser, and this, when properly rigged, supported the pulley of the breeches buoy.

To make sure that those on board the wreck understood the manner of fastening the cable, directions to this end were printed on a board which was fastened to the end of the shotted line by which the second line was sent to the ship.

The memory of what they had seen in life saving drills came back to Bob Dexter and his chums as they stood there in the storm, waiting for the captain to give the word.

All was now in readiness. Casting a last anxious eye over his gear, the commander of the brave little shore crew now gave a pull on the lanyard that ignited the charge in the mortar.

"Boom!"

The report of the small cannon crashed out above the roar and rattle, the swish and howl of the storm which was now approaching hurricane proportions. A fresh flare had been lighted by one of the coast guard, and in its intense glare Bob and his companions caught a glimpse of the black, cylindrical shot, about a foot long and three inches in diamater as it was sent out of the muzzle of the cannon.

Seaward, toward the vessel in distress, it went whizzing, carrying with it the stout little line. Coil

after coil of this cable went hurtling from the box in which it had been coiled on upright pins in a peculiar way to avoid tangling. But before the shot had been fired, all of these pins had been removed, to give the line free play.

Anxiously the captain and his men watched the line being payed out from its case. In like manner must whalemen watch the tub of line going out with a rush, once the harpoon has been fastened to the monster of the deep. But in the case of the whale, if one tub of line is emptied, another line can be bent on to the free end before the last coil goes overboard. In the case of the life savers, a new shot must be attempted, the line and weight being hauled in from the sea. In some cases, of course, a second line and shot may be all ready to be used.

Luckily this held true in the case of the Beacon Beach station, for soon after the shot had been fired it was evident that the charge of powder had not been powerful enough, since the line soon ceased running out and fell slack on the beach.

"Charge and a half!" cried Captain Hanford. "Bend on a new shot, men! We'll try again."

They did not have to pull back the now useless line and again coil it on pins in the box. Instead another line was quickly brought in place, a weight fastened on, and dropped into the mortar when an additional amount of powder had been put into the small cannon.

"Stand by! All ready!" called the captain.

Then, a moment later:

"Fire!"

This time the captain let one of his men pull the lanyard while he watched, as best he could, the outward shooting of the weight and line.

"She's fast!" he cried a moment later, when, with his hand on the line as it fell slack on the beach, he felt, at the other end, some one on board the stranded and stricken ship pulling the life cord. "Bend on the other line!" he cried to his men.

And while they were doing this, the two who had gone to rescue the man washed up on the beach, came running back.

"There's no one to be found!" cried Abel Short, and in the glare of the brilliant signal light all eyes turned on Bob Dexter and his chums.

CHAPTER IV

WRECK OF THE "SEA HAWK"

CAPTAIN HANFORD was so occupied, for the moment, in seeing to it that the second line was properly bent to the one which had been shot to the wrecked vessel, that he did not seem to give heed to what Abel Short had shouted at him. However, when once the commander of the life savers had made sure that all was going well, he turned to the two men who had been sent on the errand of mercy.

"What's that?" he asked, and all paused for the reply during a temporary lull in the storm, which, in spite of this, seemed growing worse every moment.

"You sent us to save a man these boys said they had pulled up off the beach," reported Mr. Short.

"Yes! Well, where is he?" cried the captain. "Careful with that line now!" he exclaimed, turning to those who were paying out the stronger cable. "Don't let her foul!"

"The man wasn't there—he was gone!" said Jim Hart.

"Gone!" fairly shouted the captain.

"Gone?" echoed Bob Dexter, and his chums murmured the same word. "Gone?"

"Clean gone—wasn't there at all—by the old tree I use for a marker," went on Abel. "That's where you said you left him; wa'n't it?" he demanded.

"Yes," replied Bob.

"You couldn't have pulled him up high enough then, boys," spoke the captain, and there was regret in his voice. "Mighty high sea to-night. Must have washed him back again."

"But we did pull him up high enough!" declared Ned.

"Away up among the sand dunes," added Harry. "We laid him down in the tall grass. No waves could come up there; could they?"

"No, I don't see how they could," admitted Captain Hanford. "No tide would wash up among the dunes. Are you *sure* there was a man?" he asked, as, in the glare of the red flare he cast an anxious eye to the work of paying out the cable to the stricken ship.

"Of course we found the man!" declared Bob. "We picked him up and carried him out of reach of the water. He had a black beard."

"Was he alive?" asked Jim.

"We thought so, though we couldn't be sure," replied Bob. "We looked at him by our flashlights, and he seemed alive."

"Well, he isn't there now!" said Abel Short, and he seemed to think it was the fault of the boys.

"Mighty queer," murmured Bob. And it was to develop into something more than "queer," before many days had passed.

"Well, we'll have to let him go, for the time being," stated the captain. "Got to save those on this ship. Stand by, everybody!"

Interested, and somewhat anxious as the boys were to know the fate of the man they had picked up on the beach, there was more interest, just then, in watching the work of rescue.

It was proceeding with surprising quickness, considering the stress and excitement of the storm. The second shot had taken the weighted line squarely across the deck of the schooner, as the vessel proved to be, and those on board, knowing what to do, had at once began to haul in on the line, to get the stronger cable aboard. And to the end of this second line was fastened a stout hawser, which was soon made fast to one of the masts.

It was on this stout manila cable that the breeches buoy ran on strong pulleys. The canvas breeches and the life preserver attached to them was now hauled from the shore out to the vessel by the second cord. Meanwhile, the shore end of the heavy hawser, on which the pulleys ran, had been made fast to the mast in the sand near the life saving station.

"I've got hot coffee ready up at the house," said the cook of the life savers. "Rush the men up as fast as they come ashore."

"That's what we'll do!" cried Captain Hanford. "All ready men?" he asked.

"All ready," was the answer. "We're just waiting for the signal from on board."

The next move must come from those on the wrecked craft, since the breeches buoy was not to be pulled back until it held a passenger. And, a moment later, a rocket sent up from the ship announced that the first man to be taken off was in position.

"Pull away, my lads!" the captain cried.

And pull they did, with a will.

The rain, the darkness and the storm, all combined to prevent a view of what was happening aboard the ship. But it was easy to imagine what was taking place. Seated in the canvas affair, his legs dangling in the water, the man was being pulled to safety. Any long rope will sag in the middle, of its own weight. And when to this is added the weight of the breeches buoy and a man in it, the sag, or dip, is bound to be greater. It was so in this case.

At first, after leaving the ship, the height of the rope held the first rescued one to ride above the lashing waves. But as he neared the center of the rope, he went lower and lower. At first his feet

were washed by the angry foam-crested breakers. Then his legs dipped in and finally his whole body as those on shore pulled him toward them.

Then, for a moment or two he was wholly under water, not so much because the rope sagged that much, as because the waves broke over his head.

It was a fearful, nerve-racking and exhausting trip—that short one from the vessel to shore, even in the safety of the life belt and the canvas jacket, and doubtless the seaman, hardened as he may have been to dangers, felt that his last moment had come.

But he was quickly hauled through the surf, and pulled to safety up on the beach. Ready and willing hands lifted him from his wet cradle, and hurried him, half exhausted as he was, to the warmth and shelter of the life savers' house. There he was undressed and given hot coffee and soup.

"Good work!" cried Ned.

"You said it!" echoed Harry.

"If only that man we picked up had waited for this, he would have been saved, too," spoke Bob.

"How do you know he isn't saved?" inquired Ned.

"Well, he wasn't on the upper beach, where we left him," was the reply.

"Maybe he crawled off by himself," suggested Harry. "Look there comes another one ashore!"

He had seen, in the glare of the flaring lights, the breeches buoy again pulled to shore from the vessel.

The life savers were doing great team work now—they were in their proper element.

"Wow! That was a bad one!" exclaimed Ned, as a larger wave than any before smote the beach, and seemed to shake the very foundations of the shore.

"The storm has only begun to tear things apart," stated Ned.

"Hope the ship doesn't break up until they get everybody off," remarked Harry.

"That's right," echoed his chums.

This thought seemed to actuate the life savers, for they worked with redoubled energy, pulling back the buoy each time some one on board the craft took his place in it.

Back and forth, back and forth went the queer contrivance, than which no more efficient means of saving life from wrecks near shore has been devised. True it is that there are closed steel carriers, which may be this hauled back and forth, but they take longer to put in operation, and are not always safe.

Perhaps half a dozen men had been hauled out of the raging, salty spume and waves—the boys had not kept accurate count—when Harry pointing to the group of savers cried:

"Look! There's a woman!"

"Sure enough!" agreed Bob.

Wet and bedraggled she was, yet undoubtedly a woman, who was just then being lifted from the

canvas breeches and taken in charge by those who have devoted their lives to saving others.

"Captain's wife, maybe," suggested Ned.

"Then they're all off but the captain," declared Harry. "The captain always is the last to leave."

"I thought they saved women first," commented Bob.

"Maybe she didn't want to take a chance until she saw how the thing worked," spoke Ned.

"That's so," came from Bob. "It was probably braver for the first man to chance it than to stand aside and let the woman go first. I guess you're right, Ned."

Later they learned that such was the case, and, a few minutes after the woman had been saved, another man was brought ashore. And then a little cheer went up from the fisherman and others who had gathered on Beacon Beach. For the captain had come ashore last—true to tradition and the honorable custom of the sea—and had reported that no one was left on the stricken ship.

"What vessel is it?" some one asked.

"The *Sea Hawk*," was the reply. The boys, from where they stood on the outskirts of the throng, could not be sure whether it was the ship's captain who spoke, or some one else. "From South America," was the added information.

"Did you hear that?" shouted Ned in Bob's ear—indeed less voice than a shout could not well be

heard in that turmoil of the storm and the angry sea. "Maybe it has a lot of queer animals on board."

"Animals?" questioned Bob, wonderingly.

"Yes, for a circus, or museum, you know. Lots of ships bring monkeys and other animals from South America. Maybe there's a lot of big snakes—boa constrictors—on the *Sea Hawk*."

"Maybe—and maybe not," remarked Bob. "There's excitement enough for one night without that."

"What do they do next?" asked Harry. "Can they save the ship?"

"In this storm? I guess nixy!" exclaimed Bob. "They're lucky enough to have gotten all the men off."

"I wonder if that man we picked up on the beach was one of the crew?" spoke Ned.

"Sure he was," declared Harry. "He must have jumped overboard and tried to swim for it—or he may have been washed off deck by a big wave. But he was on the *Sea Hawk* all right."

"Good name—I like that—sounds as if there might be a story back of it," stated Bob. "The *Sea Hawk!* Oh, boy! I'd like to have been on board her down in South America."

"Guess she'll never sail again," was Harry's opinion. "And there may be a story about her in the newspapers. This rescue would make a good yarn."

"You let out an earfull that time," remarked Bob.

"And, speaking of ears, mine are full of fresh and salt water. I vote we go back up on the hill and see if anything is left of our camp. There isn't much more to see here. We can come down in the morning, and maybe some of the sailors will tell us how it happened. It was queer the lighthouse beacon went out—just when it was most needed."

"It sure was," agreed his chums.

The knot of fishermen and life savers on the beach was dispersing now, moving toward the sheltering house whither the crew, and the captain and his wife, had been taken.

Bob and his chums, not feeling as free to enter as did the inhabitants of Beacon Beach, started back toward their camp. But they had not gone far before they heard some one running after them over the sand, and a voice hailed them:

"Hey, lads, wait a minute!"

"What's the matter?" asked Bob, turning.

Now that the flares had died down it was almost impossible to see anything, and the boys could pick out their way only by occasionally flashing their pocket electric torches.

Bob focused his in the direction of the voice, and the gleam picked up the face and form of Abel Short.

"Show me just where you laid that man down," he said. "I want to make sure me and Jim didn't make a mistake."

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob. "Yes—of course. Come on, we'll show you the place."

It was not easy to locate, in the storm and darkness, but the boys were used to marching along camp trails, and at last found the spot. They approached the gnarled pine tree under which they had placed the man who had been, as they thought, washed up by the sea.

"There it is!" exclaimed Harry, pointing.

Bob, who had the most powerful flashlight, extended it toward the lone tree in the dunes. And, as his light was focused on the spot he gave a cry and exclaimed:

"There he is now! That man! Look!"

Sharply defined in the bright light was an upright figure—the figure of a man. He turned a white face toward the approaching group. And then, an instant later, Bob's torch went out, and the scene was in blackness—inky blackness through which surged down a pelting shower of rain, sent stinging into their faces by the cruel wind.

CHAPTER V

AN UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCH

"WHAT's the matter, Bob?" cried Harry. "Why don't you show a light so we can pick up that man?"

"Yes, turn on the glim," added Ned.

"I'm trying to—guess the battery has gone on the blink," was the answer from the amateur detective. "Never knew it to happen before, though."

"That's always the way—just when you want a thing to work it won't," commented Ned. "Hi, there, you!" he shouted into the darkness of the storm. "Wait a minute! We're coming to get you!"

"Yes! Stand still!" yelled Abel Short. "I'll take you to the life saving station!"

But there came no answer from the strange man with the white face and the black beard—the man who had been picked up out of the sea, but who had so strangely disappeared.

Meanwhile Ned and Harry had been trying to get their flashlights out from their pockets where they had stowed them away when Bob had announced he would use his, as it was larger and more power-

ful. But with the failure of his so unexpectedly, there was need of the others.

Suddenly, however, Bob got his light to work again.

"The switch was caught," he explained as he flashed on a brilliant beam of light. He played it in the direction where the strange man had last been observed.

But all that the light focused on was the gnarled and stunted pine tree, the dunes amid which it stood, the long, saw-toothed sedge grass, whipped hither and yon by the wind, and an expanse of white sand. That was all.

"There's no man there!" exclaimed Ned.

"He's gone again!" added Harry.

"Yes, I saw him!" declared Bob. "He was looking right at us—he must have seen us before my light went out."

"Oh, he saw *us* all right," declared Abel Short. "But it's my opinion he didn't want us to see *him*. He can't be so bad off as you boys thought, or he couldn't get up and run away as he did. Guess he was playing 'possum on you!"

"He certainly appeared to be all in when we picked him up," declared Ned.

"Dead, I'd call him," contributed Harry. "He was as limp as Mr. Tonk's seaweed!"

"There's something queer about this!" declared the life saver, as he stood there in the downpour of

rain with the boys. Bob had his torch partly under his coat to protect it from the water, but it gave sufficient light, even thus shaded, for them to see by.

"There certainly has a lot of things happened since we put up our tent this afternoon," declared Ned. "What with the wreck, the storm, this strange man appearing and disappearing and the lighthouse going dark when it was most needed——"

"That was the worst of all!" interrupted Mr. Short quickly. "Not that it would have saved the *Sea Hawk,* even if the light had been blinking, for she was too far in shore to get out against that wind. But the light ought to have shown—some other vessel may get off her course on account of it being out."

"It's going now, though," said Ned, as he pointed of the intermittent flashing of the beacon. They could not see it clearly from where they stood, around a point of the beach amid the sand dunes, but they could see the reflection of the focused beams on the mist-laden air.

"Yes, it's going now," conceded Abel Short. "But they'll have to be an inquiry into why it went out as it did. The government doesn't like things to happen that way. Amos Wendy'll have to explain matters to the inspector."

"Does Amos Wendy take care of the light?" asked Bob.

"He's supposed to—yes. And I'll say this for him—it's the first time I've ever known it to go out. There's a thermostatic control on the lantern so that if it should go out when he's asleep a bell would ring and wake him up. Must have been something wrong.

"Well, there's no use hunting for a man that doesn't want to be taken care of," went on the life saver grimly. "And I've got other things to do than tramp around these sand dunes in a storm. There's plenty of work back at the station. You boys going home?"

He peered at them from under the dripping brim of his sou'wester hat as they stood in a circle, Bob's guarded torch gleaming dully.

"Not exactly home," remarked Harry. "We live back in Cliffside. We came here for a vacation camping trip."

"Oh, yes, I heard you were coming. Well, I wish you luck!"

"We may need it—I mean luck," commented Bob. "The storm may have carried away the tent."

"Well, if you find it down, come back to the station—we'll look out for you," promised the sea veteran. "We've had a bigger shipwrecked crew on our hands than the one from the *Sea Hawk*. So come down if you find your place awash."

"Thanks," said Harry. "But maybe our tent stood."

"And if you see that queer man, ask him what he means by going dead and then coming to life again," suggested Abel Short.

"We will," promised Bob.

"Good night!" The life saver waved a wet hand to them as he turned to trudge back down the beach toward his station.

"Good night," echoed the lads, and with mingled feelings they resumed their way back up the knoll.

Many thoughts were in the minds of each lad. They were thrilled by what they had witnessed—the rescues from the *Sea Hawk,* and they were puzzled by the strange actions of the man with the black beard. Also they were worried about the state in which they might find their camp. They had not had time to really get it in shape before the storm. And if they found it much ripped up it would mean, perhaps, a break in the vacation they had planned.

"The tent can't have any more than blown away," commented Ned, as they toiled up the hill.

"Cheerful prospect," murmured Harry.

"I've a hunch that we'll find everything all right," said Bob.

And he proved to be nearly in the right. For when the lads reached their camp, with the downpour of rain keeping up as hard as ever, they found their tent still standing. It sagged a bit at one corner, where a peg had pulled out, because the rope attached to it was not sufficiently loosened,

but aside from a little water that had blown and seeped into the canvas house, all was well.

"Some of the grub is a bit wet, but most of it is all right," reported Harry, after a brief inspection.

"How about the beds?" asked Bob. "Hope they're dry."

"As a bone!" exclaimed Ned, who gave them a quick try. "We're all right, my hearties! And now me for some hot coffee and a bit of grub!"

"Coffee this time of night, or, rather, morning, will keep you awake," stated Bob, who was a little older than his chums.

"Nothing's going to keep me awake when I hit the pillow," declared Harry. "Go ahead and make the coffee, Ned."

Which that lad did, the others helping, so that soon after coming back from their adventurous trip to the beach, the campers were sitting down to a small, but substantial meal. And the hot coffee seemed to have no ill effect, so wet through and tired were they with all that had taken place. Contrary to Bob's prediction, they all slept well, in spite of the coffee and the storm that raged the remainder of the night.

It was still raining when they awakened in the morning to the prospect of a cold and cheerless day, but a lighted oil stove soon filled the tent with warmth, and in the cheerful, if not very poetical, glow of the burning wicks, the lads ate breakfast.

"I didn't know a tent could get so warm," observed Ned, as he arose to turn down the stove.

"Oh, a tent is one of the warmest houses you can live in, if it's well put up," declared Bob. "I talked once with some gypsies—at least they called themselves that—and the man said he and his family lived all winter in a tent, and with lots of snowstorms, and yet they never caught cold or were ill. You see once the inside of the tent is heated the warm air stays there, and the cold air from the outside can't get in."

"I'm glad you know all about it," chuckled Harry. "And, if you fellows have finished stuffing yourselves, I vote we go down to the life saving station and hear what the wreck survivors have to say. There must be a good story in it."

"It's still raining," observed Ned, motioning toward the roof of the tent on which the drops of water were still pelting.

"Well, we have our slickers," and Bob waved a hand toward the yellow oilskin garments, which had dried out since the excursion into the night. "Let's go!"

"Can't hold me back!" cried Harry. "I'm with you!"

"And on the way we'll have a look around that pine tree, where we laid the dead man," suggested Ned.

"The dead man?" cried Bob.

"I mean Black Beard—that's as good a name for him as any—Black Beard—the fellow we picked up and put above high tide."

"But he isn't dead!" went on Bob.

"Might just as well be," asserted Ned, more cheerfully than the conversation looks in print. "He's disappeared; hasn't he?"

"Well, we saw him when we were coming back here," spoke Harry. "And then he vanished again."

"Mighty queer," commented Bob. "But it wouldn't be a bad idea to have a look around."

Leaving the camp snug against their return, the lads went out into the rain, well protected against rough weather by their slickers. The storm was still keeping up, but was evidently waning, since the wind was not so fierce. The sea, however, was very rough, and was pounding on the beach and the rocks as if to tear them apart.

Out at Shark Rock there could be seen, through the mist of rain, a dim shape which the boys knew was the wreck of the *Sea Hawk*. The schooner had been caught on some sharp tooth of the "Shark," or had been washed upon some submerged ledge, and so had been held up from sinking.

Great waves washed almost over it, however, and the fate of her captain and crew, had they not been taken off in the breeches buoy, could easily be imagined.

Down on the beach, near the mast, some of the

life savers were hauling in what remained of their ropes. For the cables had, of necessity, been left attached to the wreck when the captain was the last man taken off, there being no one to cast them loose.

But the angry sea had done what man could not do, and had ripped loose some of the attached ropes, so that they dangled in the sea. The breeches buoy was salvaged, having been loosened after the captain was lifted out. Then such ropes as could be hauled ashore were now being coiled on the sand.

"We'll go down and have a talk with them," said Bob, as he and his chums watched this work from a distance.

"But first let's have a look for that disappearing man," put in Ned.

However, they had no success, as was soon proved by a visit to the gnarled pine tree. For there was no sea castaway there, nor even were there any Robinson Crusoe footprints visible; the rain having washed them out of the sand.

In and about the dunes the boys searched for any trace of the mysterious stranger. But they found nothing—not so much as a piece of rag that might have been torn from his garments.

"Guess he went back into the sea where he came from," observed Harry.

"Looks like it," agreed Ned.

"Hark!" suddenly ordered Bob. "I hear some one calling!"

CHAPTER VI

STRANGE SUSPICIONS

HARRY and Ned had been so intent on searching for the stranger of the night that they had not thought of anything save coming upon some trace of him. Consequently Bob's sudden command rather startled them.

"What do you mean—some one calling us?" demanded Harry.

"Just what I said—listen!" ordered the young detective.

His two chums then heard a distinct hail:

"Hello up there—you at the pine tree!"

The voice was faint and far off.

"It's that man—he's hidden in a sand cave—or somewhere!" declared Ned.

The boys had moved in some distance from the edge of the first row of sand dunes, and were deep in the sedge grass. But at Ned's words they ran back toward the pine tree.

Later Ned admitted he had an idea that there might be some sort of hole down under the half-exposed roots of the tree, and that the man of the

night—the mysterious black-bearded stranger—was down in there.

But this theory proved false, and a moment later, when the hail came again, Bob gave a laugh and cried:

"Aren't we stupid? There's who called!" and he pointed to the group of life savers engaged in salvaging what they could of their rope apparatus.

And, now that the lads were in plain sight of those lower down on the beach, it was very evident that it was one of these men who had called. For they saw one of them raise his arm as though signaling, and again came the hail:

"What are you doing there?"

"Let's go down and tell them," suggested Ned. "Maybe they've found the man we're looking for."

It was a quick journey the lads made, half sliding, half running down the slope that led from the hill of sand dunes, and the gnarled pine tree, to the sands of Beacon Beach. They found four men engaged in hauling ropes in from the sea. Two were Abel Short and Jim Hart, and the others were strangers to the lads, but, it was evident, members of the life saving crew.

"Oh, it's you boys; eh?" commented Abel, when the three campers were close enough to be clearly recognized.

"Did you think it was some one else?" asked Bob.

"Well, yes, in a way I did," Abel Short admitted.

"I happened to look up, and I only saw one person moving around the old tree. I thought it was the missing man."

"So that's why you hailed us?" inquired Harry.

"That's why I shouted up at you—yes," admitted the life saver. "There's something queer about that fellow—if there ever really was such a person," and he glanced sharply at the lads.

"Oh, there's a man all right—we found him on the beach," said Bob, a little nettled at doubt being cast on the story of himself and his chums. "We were looking for him around the tree when we heard you calling."

"First we thought it might be the man himself," said Ned.

"But it wasn't," went on Harry.

"I reckon that fellow's out of his head," spoke one of the other life savers, a man later addressed as Tom Cadmus. "He may be from the wreck, and have got hit on the head when he was washed overboard, or when he jumped, to swim in from Shark Rock. That would make him act funny—getting a whack on the head. I got whacked with an oar once, and I did a lot of queer things. Maybe that's why this fellow, when he came to, ran off and hid, and then came back and ran off again."

"Maybe," agreed Harry. "Did you find out whether any one of the crew is missing? They're all down there; aren't they?" he asked, pointing to

the station. "If there was one missing the captain would know it."

"Reckon he would," agreed Jim Hart. "But we haven't had time to ask him—leastways I haven't—been so all-fired busy," he apologized.

The others were in like case, and Abel explained that some members of the saved crew had been taken ill after being pulled through the turmoil of waters, and all the resources of the station had been used on their behalf.

In consequence no more than the bare fact that the *Sea Hawk* had been wrecked was obtained—no details were secured—at least none of the four talking now to the boys knew any.

"Though if a member of the crew was missing I should think the schooner's captain would have spoken of it," commented Bob.

"He was mighty concerned about his wife—she was pretty sick," explained Tom Cadmus. "But she's all right now."

"Could we go down and see the crew?" asked Harry, deferentially.

"Sure you could," answered Abel heartily. "They'll be glad to have some one to talk to. We'll be going back in a minute or two. Got in about all the rope we can save."

The campers watched the men working away, helping in the coiling of the water-soaked cable, and presently, when it had been placed well above high-

water mark, to be picked up later, the party tramped on down the beach toward the station of the life saving crew.

"Reckon it's going to clear this afternoon," observed Tom, casting aloft a critical weather eye.

"We certainly hope so," commented Bob. "It will give our camp a chance to dry out."

"You must be pretty well soaked," spoke Jake Tunnison, the fourth member of the life savers.

"Oh, our tent stood up pretty well," said Bob, not a little proud of his outdoor ability.

The party was almost at the station when the boys observed, coming toward them, an old man who had about him a certain air of distinction.

"Is that the captain of the *Sea Hawk*?" inquired Ned in a low voice of Abel Short.

"Who, him? No, that's old Amos Wendy—the lighthouse keeper," was the answer.

"And he looks worried," commented Jim.

"Well he may be," went on Abel. "Didn't his light go out in a storm? And that's a serious business. There'll be a government inspector down here as soon as it's known."

"The *Sea Hawk* wasn't wrecked on that account —was she?" asked Harry.

"Don't believe so—though we haven't heard for sure," spoke Jim.

"Well, it wasn't Amos Wendy's fault that she wasn't!" declared Abel, and the boys thought they

detected a trace of bitterness in his voice. Later they learned that he and Amos had applied for the position of light keeper at the same time, but Amos received the post, to the ever-increasing bitterness of his rival.

"Well, Amos, I see you're still alive," greeted Tom Cadmus.

"So're you!" retorted the keeper. "Pretty bad storm we had," and he looked sharply at the three lads. He knew, evidently, that they were strangers in Beacon Beach.

"Yes, pretty bad," admitted Abel in sour tones. "Wind was too much for you, wa'n't it, Amos? Blew your lantern plumb out to sea, I reckon!" and he chuckled grimly.

"Yes, the light did go out a bit," admitted the keeper with a grim tightening of his lips. "And it wasn't my fault, either. I got it going again as soon as I could. But the schooner was almost on Shark Rock then. In fact she was headed for it when my light was going proper. Can't blame it on me."

"Don't know about that," snapped out Abel. "That remains to be looked into—as it will, 'most likely." He seemed to enjoy the discomfiture of his successful rival.

"Oh, yes, one of them pesky inspectors will come pottering around," sighed Amos. "Well, I got the records all straight for him. It wasn't my fault.

The light was going strong, except for a few minutes, and then something happened."

"Maybe you fell asleep," suggested Abel, and Bob and his chums thought the light keeper would rush at and attack his rival, so fierce was the look on the older man's face.

"Well, s'posing I did fall asleep?" he demanded after a moment or two, during which he seemed to regain control of himself. "I'm allowed to do that. With only me on duty, that is officially, I have to get some rest. The government knows that and makes allowance for it. That's why I got a thermostat on the light."

"A thermostat?" inquired Bob, interestedly. Anything of a scientific nature always attracted him.

"We studied about thermostats in school," commented Ned.

"But I never knew they had them in lighthouses," remarked Harry. "What are they for?"

"The one on my light rings a bell in case the light goes out, or in case it overheats," explained the keeper.

"Didn't it ring last night?" Abel asked, sarcastically. "Or maybe Amos is getting deaf," he added, with cruel wit.

"No, I'm not!" snapped out the old man, who, in spite of his years, was firm and vigorous. "But the bell didn't ring—that's what the trouble was."

"The bell didn't ring?" cried Jim Hart.

"No, didn't even tinkle, and it should have rung loud enough to rouse the seven sleepers as soon as the light went out. There's something suspicious about it," went on the keeper. "Mighty suspicious! I'll be glad to have that government inspector come and look around."

"What do you mean—suspicious?" asked Tom Cadmus.

"I mean that thermostat was tampered with!" was the answer. "I'm going in to town now to get an electrician to come out and look at it. There's something suspicious, I'm telling you! That thermostat never acted that way before."

"Maybe Bob could tell you what's wrong with it," suggested Harry. "He's pretty good at electricity, and, besides, he's a detective."

"A detective!" cried the light keeper, and the word was echoed by the men of the life saving crew.

"Sure he's a detective!" declared Ned, in spite of the kick which Bob planted on his leg. "He'll solve the mystery for you!"

CHAPTER VII

IN THE LIGHTHOUSE

"Look here now! Say, you aren't the government inspector; are you, my boy?" and as Amos Wendy asked this question he looked appealingly at Bob Dexter.

"The government inspector—what do you mean?" the lad inquired.

"Well, he said you were a detective," and Amos pointed at Ned. "I know they have detectives in the postal service—I was postmaster once, at Bailey's Corners, and there was some stamps missing."

"Sure you didn't take 'em?" sarcastically hinted Abel.

"Don't pay no attention to him!" begged the keeper of the light. "He's been sore on me ever since I got ahead of him in being appointed to the Beacon Beach light. He's jealous—that's all."

"If I'd a' been on duty I wouldn't have slept through the ringing of the alarm bell, though, I can tell you that!" snapped out the life saver.

"I tell you the bell didn't ring!" insisted Amos. "But say, have you come to inspect me?" he asked.

"I'm all ready for you. My books are all in order—right tally of oil, mantles and so on. The only thing that's wrong is the thermostat, and I'm going to have that looked to. I was on my way now. But you can come right over to my place and——"

"Don't make a mistake!" interrupted Bob. "I have nothing to do with the government, and I'm not here to inspect your light."

"But he—he said you are a detective," and the old man pointed an accusing finger at Ned.

"He says a lot of things he oughtn't to say!" commented Bob.

"You know you have done some detective work!" insisted the lad whom Bob had kicked, but too late. "You found Jennie Thorp and you got back the Golden Eagle."

"I'm just an amateur," spoke Bob, diffidently. "I have found out a few things—more by good luck than anything else, I guess."

"Brains, boy, brains!" declared Harry who was eager to see his chum get full credit.

"My friends call me a detective," Bob modestly went on, "but I hold no official position. We're just down here on a vacation camping trip."

"Oh!" and from the manner in which Amos said this it might be judged that he was disappointed. "Well, if you were an inspector, come down to see why the light failed, I'm all ready for you," the

keeper went on. "Or I will be, soon as I get an electrician to look at my thermostat."

"Bob can do that for you," put in Ned. "He's good at electricity. Took the prize in High School, and what he doesn't know about ignition system of an auto isn't worth knowing."

"Are you what he says?" asked the lighthouse keeper, wistfully and timidly. "If you are——"

"Well, I do know a little about electricity," admitted the young detective, modestly enough. He was willing to claim this scientific title though averse to being publicly known as an amateur sleuth.

"Then maybe you'll come over and look at my thermostat!" begged the keeper, eagerly. "I'm sure something is wrong with it. Never knew it, before, not to ring the bell in case the lamp went out while I was asleep. And I've got a right to sleep at night—you can read it in my instruction book," he said, shaking a defiant fist at Abel Short.

"Um!" was all the latter rejoined. "Let you tell it!"

"I'll come over and look at your apparatus, if you like," offered Bob. "In fact I was going to ask if we could go through the lighthouse some day."

"It's always open to visitors during certain hours," was the reply. "'Tisn't visiting hours yet, for I haven't finished cleaning up. But you're different. Come on—and bring your friends with you. I'd like to find out what's wrong."

"We'll be over at the station later. We'd like to hear the story of the wreck of the *Sea Hawk*," said Bob to the life savers.

"All right," answered Abel. "And if you come across that queer man make him tell what his game is."

"We will,' agreed Ned.

"What queer man is that?" questioned Amos Wendy, as he walked along the beach with the boys, in the direction of his light.

"One we found washed up out of the sea, just before they began to rescue the crew from the wreck," explained Bob, giving the details.

"Hum!" murmured the keeper, when the tale was ended. "Yes, he might have been hit on the head with a floating bit of wreckage, and be wandering around now, out of his mind. Sometimes, when a person goes overboard, and gets a whack on the skull, they are only partly conscious, and water doesn't get into their lungs so much as with a person that's swimming and fighting the waves.

"It might have been that way with this man. And he wasn't near to drowning when he was washed up on the beach. Then, after you laid him down in a safe place, he came to and crawled away."

"Then he crawled back again, for we saw him at the tree, and then my torch went on the blink," said Bob. "Anyhow he's gone now."

"Well, if he's around these parts, it'll become known, sooner or later," commented the keeper of the light. "Everything seems to get known in these parts, sooner or later," and he appeared a trifle bitter, as though the remarks of Abel rankled—as indeed they must.

The Beacon Beach light was in the top of a tall brick structure, which formed a part of the house in which the keeper and his wife resided. There was also a dog, for the place was lonely, at times; and there is no better company than a dog.

"Come right in," invited Mr. Wendy, as he opened the door in the tower. "We'll go right up into the light chamber. I'll bring you in the house later. And I shouldn't wonder but what my wife might have some cake or pie—how about it, mother?" and he spoke to a sweet-faced and gray-haired little old lady who opened the door of the house and looked out.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Amos?" she asked. "Did you get the electrician? Three of 'em—did you need so many?"

"No, mother, I didn't get the electrician—leastways not the one from the village. This is a detective electrician I have here."

"A detective—Oh, Amos!" She clasped her hands to her breast.

"That's all right, mother, he's only a detective

part of the time, and he didn't come down here to arrest us—so don't worry," and then he explained who the boys were.

"I don't know that I'll be able to do anything about this thermostat," said Bob, "for I've never had much to do with lighthouses. But if there is some electric wiring out of order I can fix it."

"And I told him, mother, and the other boys, also, that maybe, after we got through looking at the light, you might have a piece of cake, or some pie for them," went on Mr. Wendy.

"Why, of course! Do come in, won't you?" and she held the door invitingly open, for by now the rain had fully ceased and the sun was coming out from behind the clouds.

"I'd like to have him take a look at the thermostat first," said the keeper. "We'll be in later, mother."

"All right—don't forget," and she waved her hand at the boys, while a smile replaced the worried look on her face.

"Pie and cake are things we never forget—when there's a chance to get acquainted with them," declared Ned.

The light tower was about a hundred feet tall—one of the smaller coast beacons, and the top, where the light was installed, was reached by a winding stair of iron. Down the center of the well-like opening, dangled two highly polished weights on brass wire cables.

"Is that part of the thermostat?" asked Ned, who, as he frankly admitted, had "flunked" mechanics during his school years.

"Those are the weights that work the clock movement which turns the lens," explained the keeper. "I'll show you when we get up there."

In spite of his years, he seemed less distressed, and panted less, than did the boys during the upward climb. Complimented on his agility and the manner in which he kept his breath from going "short," Mr. Wendy laughed and said:

"Oh, I get good practice every night, going up and down."

"Do you have to come up here nights—after you set the light going?" asked Harry.

"Oh, yes, indeed. I come up regularly at ten o'clock to make sure everything is all right. And then, after I get to bed, sometimes the oil gas gets choked, or the mantle may break and the light go out. Then the bell rings and wakes me, and I come up and fix things. Only the bell didn't ring last night until after the light had been out for some time."

"How did you discover it was out?" Ned wanted to know.

"My wife awakened me—seems like she had a sort of dream, or something, that there was trouble. She looked out and didn't see the gleam of the light flashing on the waves. Then she woke me and I

came up to find the lantern dead and cold. Of course I started it again, right away—but there was a wreck—if it hadn't been for that I don't believe an inspector would be sent down." He seemed to feel his position keenly.

"Oh, well, the wreck would have happened anyhow," consoled Harry.

"Maybe," admitted the keeper. "But it looks bad for me. Now here we are. Careful of your heads!"

The last ten feet of the journey, into the light chamber proper, was made by ascending an iron ladder, and by going through a small hole in the iron platform that topped the light tower. The heavy lenses, and the apparatus that revolved them, rested on this iron platform.

The Beacon Beach light was comparatively simple in construction, though it was an important one because it warned vessels away from the danger of Shark Rock. True, there was a red warning light on Shark Rock itself—a lantern in which, night and day, burned an automatic lamp, fed with acetylene gas. Of course, during the day, no light was needed, but to save trouble in having a man go out and light it each night, the lamp burned constantly. A charge of calcium carbide, in a proper container, was put inside the lamp apparatus, and this lasted for six months. At the end of that time, more carbide was put in.

The lamp in the Beacon Beach tower flashed once

each second. This was not brought about, as you might suppose, by the light dying down and coming up again. The lights in the green traffic street signals, designed to warn automobilists, work on the principle of dying down and then flashing bright again. Clock work controls this, and a pilot light burns constantly, a stop-cock opening and shutting to feed more or less of the acetylene gas to the burner. And these lights burn night and day, as you may have observed.

But the light in the Beacon Beach lantern burned with a constant flame all night, and the bright flashes which were visible for about five miles at sea were caused by peculiarly shaped lens revolving around the light, which was placed in the center. The lens was so arranged that, as it revolved, it sent, once each second, a straight beam of light out to sea. Nice calculation and adjustment of the clock work mechanism was needed to bring this about.

Captains of vessels, and navigators, know each light on their particular coast, and when they see one flashing at certain intervals, with a certain degree of brightness, they know, among hundreds of other beacons, just which lighthouse they are near. Thus they can be sure of their position.

"Why, it's a regular gas lamp—a Welsbach mantle and everything, isn't it?" exclaimed Ned, as he looked at the lantern.

"Well, it's a gas light, and has a mantle, but it

isn't the kind of gas you think it is," said the keeper. "The gas is made by mixing kerosene oil and air under pressure. The oil and air tanks are down below. The light is fed with gas by these copper pipes," and he pointed to them. "Once the mixture is heated it mingles and produces its own gas, and there is no smoke to dim the lenses as there might be if ordinary gas were used, or even oil, as used to be the case."

"Electricity would be better," commented Ned.

"Yes, but we haven't any electricity in Beacon Beach," explained the keeper. "Besides, this does very well. I'll show you how it works."

"Is that the thermostat?" asked Bob, pointing to a curious bit of metal apparatus just above the apex of the lantern.

"That's it—that's what went wrong, somehow," said the keeper. "That's what I want you to look at, if you will. Now I'll start the light going and you can see how it works."

He turned some valves, ignited some gasolene in a shallow trough just below the frail white mantle, and, in a few seconds the light was glowing, as the boys could observe at a place where there was an opening in the iron revolving frame that held the prismatic lens.

"Now see if you can tell what the matter is," begged Mr. Wendy as he touched another lever, setting the lens to revolving.

CHAPTER VIII

BLACK WATER

THERE was a whirring sound as the brass wheels in the clock-work gears turned, thus moving the lens, and there was a hissing noise as the air-mixed kerosene sprayed through the needle valve to become ignited, thus heating the mantle to incandescence.

"Is this just the way it works at night?" asked Bob, who wanted to make sure he was observing real conditions.

"Just the same," answered Amos Wendy, "except, of course, it's dark at night."

"Oh, sure," agreed Bob with a smile. "But now tell me how the thermostat is supposed to work."

"I don't know the scientific principle of it," stated the keeper, "all I know is that when the light goes out one bell rings near the head of my bed."

"One bell?" questioned Harry, for he had been struck by the use of the word. "Is there more than one bell?"

"Oh, yes," answered Mr. Wendy. "There are two. The second one rings in case the light gets too hot—overheats, you know. That would happen in

case there was a leak in the valve, and too much oil gas was fed to the flame. But I've never known that to happen. I can't tell you how the thermostat works—but it does—or it did until last night. Then the light went out and the bell didn't ring. There was something wrong, and I have my suspicions as to who did it."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Bob Dexter.

"Never mind. I'm not saying anything now. But see if you can find anything wrong with the apparatus."

Bob looked it over carefully while the clock wheels, actuated by the slowly-descending weights, whirred about. The weights, you understand, were like those in an old-fashioned "Grandfather's Clock," and took the place of the more modern spring. Weights have been found more dependable than springs, however, for such apparatus as is used in lighthouses.

The young detective at once understood the principle on which the thermostat worked. Doubtless you boys have already formed a correct picture of it in your minds. But some may be a bit hazy and so I shall explain it, or, rather, I'll let Bob explain it for you, as he did to his two chums and to Amos Wendy.

"It's like this," said Bob, pointing to a circular disk of metal, suspended on a long metal rod above the flame of the oil gas lamp. "On that metal disk

are two other strips of a peculiar kind of metal, or, rather, a combination of metals that expand with the heat and contract with the cold more than any other known substance.

"Now while the light is burning these two strips of metal are heated, and expand, or swell, so that they touch. While they are touching they form an electrical circuit, and as long as that circuit is complete the bell doesn't ring."

"That's queer," spoke Ned. "I thought you rang an electric bell when you pushed a button and completed the circuit."

"So did I," said Harry.

"That's the usual way," admitted Bob with a smile, "but didn't you ever hear of closed circuit work in electricity?"

"Seems to me I did," admitted Harry.

"The old style telegraph instrument is an example," spoke Bob. "I'm not trying to give a professor's lecture," he continued with a smile, "but it's best that we all understand this if we are going to solve the mystery."

"We'll let you do all the solving, Detective Dexter," chuckled Ned.

"Aw, cut it out!" advised his chum. "You're in this with me—you and Harry. If there's any solving to be done we'll do it all together."

"I don't guarantee to do any solving," retorted Ned. "I'll leave that to you, Bob. But I see what

you mean—there is some kind of electric current that will ring a bell when the circuit is open, or broken, just as there's a kind that will ring a bell when the circuit is closed, like when you push the front door button."

"That's it," came from Bob, "though as a matter of fact all electricity is alike, except for being positive or negative. It's only in the way that the circuit is arranged that there's a difference.

"In this thermostat, for instance, the bell is kept from ringing as long as the heat expands the two pieces of metal, keeps them in contact and the circuit closed. Probably there is some arrangement of a magnetic switch which operates a regular dry battery circuit of electricity that rings the bell. I mean that as long as the heat keeps the two pieces of metal expanded, and in contact, the magnetic switch is held up and away from the two points which, if connected, would ring the bell. As soon as the light goes out, there is no longer a pull on the electric magnet. This piece of iron falls on two points of the dry battery circuit and the bell rings, just as it would if some one pushed the button."

"I'm beginning to understand," remarked Harry. "I know something about dry batteries. I've got them in my radio, home."

"And we use them in our flashlights," added Ned.

"Well, there are dry and wet batteries," said Bob. "It's the gravity cell, or wet battery, that is

used on closed circuit work like telegraph instruments and the like. While the switch of the telegrapher's key is closed a current of electricity keeps flowing through the instruments and there is no clicking sound. As soon as the switch is opened the magnet no longer holds the 'sounder' down, and up it flies, making a click. By thus opening and closing the circuit the dots and dashes are made and the telegraphers talk to each other."

"I should think," remarked Harry, while they watched the lighthouse lantern dimly gleaming in the bright sun, "I should think that it would wear out batteries to have a current flowing from them all the while, like in the gravity cells."

"That's where you're wrong," said Bob. "It's the nature of this cell, composed of zinc, copper, and sulphuric acid, or blue vitriol crystals in solution, to work best when on a closed circuit. I guess the current sort of feeds itself. You have two kinds of batteries here, haven't you?" he asked the light keeper.

"Oh, yes," was the answer, "though I don't know much about 'em. I've got a book of instructions and I follow that. But something seems to be wrong. Else why didn't the bell ring when the light went out last night?"

"That's what I'm trying to discover," said Bob. "Suppose you put the light out now and see if the bell rings."

"Wait a minute, before you do that," begged Harry. "If a bell rings when the light is out, and the expanding metals are cold, and have so shrunk that they aren't in contact, why is it that the bell doesn't ring all day long—when the light is out and cold?"

"I open a switch in the daytime," explained Mr. Wendy. "The instruction book says to do that. Once I didn't and the bell kept ringing while the light was out."

"Oh, sure, now I understand," said Harry. "The dry battery circuit switch is open so the batteries won't run down."

"Correct," spoke Bob. "Now let's try it, Mr. Wendy."

The keeper turned a valve which cut off the supply of oil gas. The hissing sound stopped, and the glowing mantle of the light grew dim. There was a slight crackling sound in the metal disk above the light.

"That's caused by the expanding metals cooling off and shrinking," Bob explained. "The bell ought to ring, soon."

They all listened carefully. An instant later a bell distinctly tinkled down below them in the living rooms of the house attached to the beacon.

"That's my bell—that's the way it rings when the light goes out!" cried the keeper. "Only it didn't do it last night!"

"Then something was wrong with the magnetic switch, I think," was Bob's opinion. "I'll take a look at it."

But the apparatus, as far as he could see, was in perfect working condition. They tried it again—several times, in fact, lighting the lamp and then letting it go out. The bell rang each time the glow of the incandescent mantle died down. Of course the bell kept on ringing, because of the circuit being closed, until the controlling switch was turned off.

"I don't understand it," Bob said. "Everything seems to be perfect. It should have rung last night, if it was like this."

"Hasn't been touched, that I know of," asserted the keeper. "It sure is a mystery. Think I'd better get the electrician?"

"It wouldn't do any harm," agreed Bob, scratching his head with a puzzled air. "It's beyond me. I don't claim to know all there is to be known, of course, about electricity, but I can't see where there is anything out of gear. Some one else might spot it in a minute, though. Better get him."

"I will," assented the keeper.

"Say! Wait! I've an idea!" cried Ned.

"Hold on to it—they're scarce!" chuckled Harry.

"It's only this," went on his chum. "You spoke of two bells," he said to the keeper, "one that rings in case the light gets too hot. Maybe that's out of

order and got mixed with the bell that rings when the light goes out."

"Yes," admitted the old man, "there are two bells. I'll turn on the light and let it overheat and you'll see what I mean."

Once more the mantle was set aglow, and when it was burning as it should, the keeper opened the control valve more widely. A blue flame shot up above the wire that held the mantle suspended, and, almost instantly, a bell clanged out loudly—a bell with widely different tone from the one that sent off an alarm when the light was out.

"You see it might crack the lens if the light was overheating very long," explained the keeper. "That's why they have a very loud bell to call my attention to it."

"It seems to be in working order," commented Bob. "Nothing wrong that I can see," he added as he finished his inspection of the second bell. "I'd like to hear what your electrician has to say," he finished.

"I'll get him," decided the keeper. "And now I haven't forgotten that mother's going to give you some cake or pie—or maybe both," he added with a chuckle. "Come on down."

Shaking his head over his inability to understand the mystery of why the bell didn't ring, as it should have done when the light died out, Bob followed his chums to the cheerful living rooms of the tower,

and there Mrs. Wendy set before them two kinds of cake, and some wonderfully flaky pie, together with glasses of foamy, creamy milk.

"Oh, boy!" murmured Ned as he beheld this feast.

"You said it!" whispered his chums.

And then they did not talk for a little while—for they were very busy.

They thanked their genial hosts, both for the feast and for Mr. Wendy's kindness in showing them how the light worked, and Bob said in leaving:

"I'm going to come back and have another go at this puzzle."

"Come any time you like," was the invitation, heartily given.

The boys walked down the sandy beach. The seas had subsided now, and the mists had cleared away. Out at Shark Rock, and mingling with the blackness of those sinister rocks, was what remained of the *Sea Hawk*.

"Say, maybe we could get a boat and row out there," proposed Ned. "It isn't far and the sea's like glass."

"Too much like broken glass for me," exclaimed Harry.

"I guess we'd better wait a bit," was Bob's opinion.

"Then let's go down to the life saving station and

hear the story of the wreck from the captain or some of the sailors," came from Ned.

"We can do that later," went on Bob. "What we ought to do now is to get our camp in better shape, fellows. We didn't half fix up after the storm. And we need some more bacon, I think. A lot of it got wet and it's likely to spoil. Check over our supplies, I say, and make sure we're in good shape. Then we can take some time off."

"Bob's right—always the call to duty!" cried Ned, but there was only good fellowship in the words.

"So be it!" agreed Harry, and the lads went up to their tent on the hill amid the pine trees.

Willing hands made short work of putting things to rights, and contrary to Bob's opinion the bacon was found to be in good shape, so that no new supply was immediately needed.

"Whew! It's hot!" cried Harry, just before noon, as he finished moving some boxes about, piling them up orderly.

"It sure is!" agreed Ned. "What say to a swim, Bob, before we have grub?"

"I'm with you!"

A little later the three lads, attired in their bathing suits, were sporting about in a sheltered cove where the waves were less powerful than out on the open beach. They chased each other up and down the sand, tripped each other and tossed each other

into the water, shouting loudly and whooping for very joy. The danger of the wreck had passed, the outcome being more happy than had at first seemed likely, though probably there was large property loss.

"What do you say to a game of leap-frog, Harry?" called Ned, when the chums had sported about on the sand and in the water for some time.

"I'm with you."

"Count me in on that," cried Bob.

Soon the three were taking turns stooping over and bending their backs, while one or the other leaped over them in the time-honored fashion.

Once Ned leaped a trifle short, and came down heavily on Harry, bearing him to the sand, upon which the two toppled in a tangled mass.

"Here, cut that out," ordered Harry as he got rid of some sand in his mouth.

"You don't s'pose I did that on purpose, do you?" asked Ned.

"Sure you did—same as I'm going to do this," and with that Harry thrust out his right foot, caught it behind Ned's left one, gave his chum a push and sent him sprawling backward.

"I'll fix you for that," yelled Ned, as he raced after Harry, but the latter dived into the waves.

For a time the boys forgot about the strangely missing black-bearded man, and Bob gave no further heed to the mystery of the lighthouse.

Ned had swum out a little farther than the oth-

ers, having called to his chums that he was going to see what a certain floating box might contain, and he had almost reached it when he gave a cry that attracted the attention of Harry and Bob.

"What's the matter?" shouted the young detective, and he had a feeling that something was wrong, or Ned would not have called in that voice.

Over the little waves that separated him from his chums Ned cried:

"The water's all black here—as black as ink! Come on out and see it!"

Instantly a sinister thought flashed through Bob's brain. He cried:

"Swim back! Swim back as fast as you can! Come on, Harry! We'd better go meet him! Get a club, if you can," for Harry was close to the beach.

"What's the matter?" Harry demanded. "And what did Ned say?"

"The water's like ink out where he is."

"Ink?" cried Harry. "What does he mean?"

"I guess it's a devil fish!" shouted Bob. 'That's what they do—squirt out ink—come on!"

CHAPTER IX

THREE QUESTIONS

HARRY paused only long enough to leap back to the beach and catch up a piece of driftwood. Then he sprang into the water and, holding the improvised club in one hand, used the other, and his legs, to swim with powerful strokes out toward Bob.

The latter was making his way to where Ned was already swimming in, for, truth to tell, he did not like the look of that black water, which had suddenly turned that inky hue while he was disporting himself in it. And the alarm Bob had shouted to him had begun to make itself felt in Ned's mind as he remembered stories he had read relating to "devil fish," that ejected a stream of ink-like substance to confuse their unlucky prey before fastening on them the parrot-like beak, on either side of which stared round, never-closing eyes.

"Come on, Harry! Come on!" shouted Bob, making rapid headway through the water.

"I'm—coming!" panted Harry, who, hampered by the stick, could not make as quick progress as

could his chum. "Is—Ned—all—right? Has—it—got—him?"

"Not yet!" Bob replied, for he glimpsed his farther-out chum swimming swiftly, but, as yet, unhampered by any death-like grip of eight snaky arms with their saucer-shaped sucking disks.

"How'd it happen?" asked Harry, for Bob had slowed up a little, so that the two were now swimming together, side by side.

"I don't know—Bob just yelled that the water was like ink—I happened to think that devil fishes can do that—guess Ned thought of it at the same time—for he lit out for shore—like a blue streak."

"Or a black streak," added Harry. "But we can't fight a devil fish! They got eight arms, or legs, and they're strong as a horse!"

Bob shot himself up out of the water and looked toward Ned. He observed the latter to be coming along easily, though swiftly, with an occasional glimpse back over his shoulder.

"Is it after you?" cried Bob.

"Doesn't seem to be," was the answer. "Guess I was too quick for him!"

And yet how any youth could imagine himself more speedy than an octopus, squid or cuttle fish it is hard to believe.

A few seconds later the three lads were together, Ned having joined his chums, and the trio was swimming for shore.

"Did you get any of the black stuff on you?" asked Harry, as they let down their feet and touched bottom, standing up to wade the remaining distance to shore.

"Don't seem to—else it all washed off, maybe, when I streaked through the water," observed Ned, with a look at such of his anatomy as showed outside the bathing suit. "Say, it was mighty queer, though. All of a sudden the water got as black as ink. First I thought I was seeing things, and then——"

"You're mighty lucky you didn't see—*something!*" commented Bob.

The boys were so excited, talking among themselves, glancing occasionally toward that portion of the partly inclosed bay where Ned had gone through the startling experience—they were so taken up with themselves, so to speak, that they did not observe, driving along a road that skirted the beach, a ramshackle wagon drawn by a bony horse. And it was not until a voice hailed them that they looked up.

"What's matter?" came the question. "See a whale or a shark? You've seen somethin', I'll be bound. Look as if you've been scared out of a year's growth!"

"It's Mr. Tonk—the expressman who helped cart our stuff over from the station," remarked Bob, and so it proved. There was Jerry Tonk, idly flicking a fly from the ear of his horse, and grinning at the lads.

"Wa'al, what was it—shark or whale?" inquired the odd character.

"Ned saw a devil fish," reported Harry.

"And it chased him," added Bob. "Didn't it, Ned?"

"Well, I didn't exactly *see* it chase me," replied the victim of the scare. "But I was afraid it would. It squirted a lot of ink out——"

"Ink!" cried Jerry Tonk with a laugh. "Then you didn't see any devil fish."

"Why not?" Bob wanted to know. "Don't devil fish throw out an ink cloud?"

"Wa'al, some kinds may, but I never heard of any that did," said the Beacon Beach expressman. "You're thinking of cuttle fish, I reckon."

"Aren't they the same?" Harry wanted to know.

"No, not exactly. A cuttle fish is small, and has ten arms, or legs, and a devil fish, or octopus, has only eight. Besides, there's a lot of other differences, though I admit they might look alike when they're in the water. But an octopus doesn't always squirt out ink, though I'm not saying they mightn't do so if they felt like it. Anyhow, you don't see many octopus critters up around here—water doesn't get warm enough. But you'll find lots of cuttle fish, some big ones, too, but they aren't dangerous."

"Aren't they?" asked Bob. "I always thought they were."

"Nope," went on Mr. Tonk. "And there's lots of

small devil fish, or squid, that aren't dangerous, either. I've used 'em for bait, lots of times. Channel and sea bass will take 'em when they won't bite on anything else—not even soft crabs. So don't get scared, boys, and break camp just 'cause a cuttle fish shot out some ink at ye. Like as not the fish was more scared than you, Ned."

"He couldn't be—not after I got to thinking of those long, snaky arms, with suckers on as big as saucers," declared the lad.

"Nothing like that around here!" laughed Mr. Tonk.

"What made it squirt out ink?" asked Harry. "Was that to blind Ned so the cuttle fish could bite him?"

"Oh, Davy Jones, no!" fairly roared the old man in glee. "That's what a cuttle fish does so's he can get away, unobserved like. It's a sort of smoke screen like you read about in the late war. The critter just spits out something like India ink, and clouds up the water. Then it can shoot away and hide."

"Well, I'm glad it wasn't any worse," remarked Bob. "I sure thought Ned was a goner—out there in that black water."

"I thought so myself," was the victim's comment. "But what you got in there, Mr. Tonk?" and he motioned to the wagon. "Look's like you were going to set up in the clothing business," for the old

man's wagon contained piles of garments, mostly coats and trousers for men, though two dresses were also noted.

"These are for the shipwrecked crew of the *Sea Hawk,*" was the answer. "They lost everything they had and we've got to lend 'em some dry clothes to put on while those that got soaked, as they were being brought ashore, are fixed up. The folks in the village sort of contributed these when they heard what had happened. 'Tisn't the first time Beacon Beach has done this, neither," concluded Mr. Tonk, with virtuous pride in his town.

"Are you taking them down to the life saving station?" asked Bob.

"Yep—down to the shipwrecked ones. They're going home—or, leastways they're going away tomorrow, I heard—that is all but the captain and his wife. They're going to stay for a while near the wreck. Seems that Captain Blackford has an interest in the *Sea Hawk,* though I don't believe she'll salvage any. Going to be a total loss, I reckon, boys," and he looked off toward Shark Rock, just in view around the point that inclosed the sheltered bay where the boys had been bathing.

"Where are the sailors going?" asked Harry.

"Oh, different places, I guess. They're out of a ship now, and they'll have to sign up elsewhere. The owners of the schooner sent down some money by telegraph, I heard, to pay their fare wherever

they wanted to go—that is, all but the captain and his wife."

"We were going down and hear their story," said Bob. "But we haven't got around to it yet."

"You'll have time after dinner," suggested Mr. Tonk.

"Were they all saved?" Harry wanted to know.

"Yep, the whole crew," replied the grizzled expressman. "There's one man missing, though—a man with a black beard. He jumped overboard and swam for shore soon as the vessel struck, but I heard you boys picked him up."

"Yes, we did," said Bob. "Did you hear anything more about him? He disappeared after we laid him down on the beach, and went to tell the life savers about him. Have they found him?"

"Not yet," reported Mr. Tonk. "They're looking for him, though, up and down the beach. Captain Blackford thinks he must have got a whang on the head that's made him silly. Simpson is his name —Nate Simpson—but he may come to himself and calm down. Then he'll join his mates. Well, see you later, boys!"

He called to his horse and drove off down the winding, sandy road. The boys looked at each other, then the gaze of Bob and Harry was concentrated on Ned and all three burst into laughter.

"To think of being scared by a little cuttle fish!" chuckled Harry.

"Well, maybe if you'd been out there—" began Ned.

"Oh, I'm not laughing *at* you, I'm laughing *with* you," Harry made haste to explain. "We were all in the same boat. But, say—what about grub, and then going down to the station and hear Captain Blackford tell how he got shipwrecked?"

"Maybe he doesn't like to talk about it," suggested Bob. "But we may get a story out of some of the crew."

Accordingly, after they had eaten and washed and put away the dishes, for they had set a standard of neatness for their camp at the seashore, the lads strolled down the hill and along the beach to where the life saving station nestled at the foot of the sand dunes.

Harry, who had run on a little ahead of his companions, now and then stopping to turn a "cartwheel" in the excess of his boyish spirits, suddenly came to a halt and seemed to be looking at something on the beach.

"What's the matter?" called Bob.

"Did you find a chest of diamonds?" asked Ned.

"Or a bottle with a mysterious message in?" went on Bob.

"It's a big crab," said Harry.

"Don't pick it up—that is if it's alive," advised Bob. "It might pinch you."

"As if I didn't know how to pick up a crab,"

boasted Harry. He reached for the object on the beach—it was a crab that had been washed up—but the next instant he drew his hand back quickly, clapped it into his mouth and howled, dancing around on one leg.

"There's the lad who knows how to pick up crabs!" laughed Bob, as his chum sucked the injury, which was bleeding.

"You'll know enough to let 'em alone next time," chuckled Ned as the lads walked on.

Captain Hanford, of the Beacon Beach station, recognized the boys and smiled genially at them. He waved his hand toward a rather sorry-looking group of men sitting in the warm sun on the porch of the station, and remarked:

"Well, Captain Blackford, here are the boys that saw your missing man."

From among the group of shipwrecked ones arose a tall, thin man, with peculiar blue eyes. They were light in color, and had a somewhat shifty and sinister look, Bob said afterward.

"Oh, are these the boys that picked up Nate and carried him off?" asked the man who had answered to the name Captain Blackford.

"We carried what we thought was a half-drowned man above high watermark," said Bob, "and then we hurried down here and told the life savers."

"But there wasn't any man where they laid one down," chimed in Abel Short.

"Though we saw him, later, just for a second," said Ned.

"Yes, I understand he was acting queer," resumed Captain Blackford. "Poor chap—he must be injured in the head. But I wish we could find him. He may be suffering, and——"

"He didn't suffer any more than we did!" suddenly and fiercely exclaimed a member of the crew. "And he's likely to be a heap sight better off than we are after he——"

"Joe Norton, be quiet!" sharply commanded the captain of the *Sea Hawk*. "Don't talk!"

The man who had spoken—evidently Joe Norton—seemed actuated by some strange rage. So eager was he to denounce the strangely missing sailor that it was difficult for him to subside at the command of his captain. His fists were clenched and his eyes snapped.

"I'll do all the talking that's to be done for this crowd," went on Captain Blackford. "I'm still in command, though my ship is wrecked," and he gazed off toward Shark Rock.

Bob and his chums began to scent some new mystery here. Why had Nate Simpson disappeared? Why was Joe Norton so fiercely eager to have him back? And why did Captain Blackford want the matter kept quiet?

These three questions greatly interested the young detective.

CHAPTER X

OVERBOARD

"THAT's all right, Captain. No offense! No offense!" murmured Joe Norton, and his air was more abject and cringing now. "But I would like to catch that black-bearded son of a sea cook!"

"That will do, Norton!" commanded the captain, sharply. "We'll soon locate him."

"Can't be any too soon for me," commented one of the other shipwrecked men. "Look at me—wearing borrowed clothes!"

"And they don't fit—neither!" chimed in another.

"That will do, my men!" spoke Captain Blackford easily. "We're mighty lucky to be here at all—and it was very kind of our friends to get us some clothes while those we came ashore in are being dried out."

"Oh, of course—I didn't mean anything!" the objector hastened to remark. "I was only saying if we had what Simpson has——"

The captain shot a look at his seaman and the latter subsided with a swallowing motion of his

throat that disposed of the words he had choked hastily back.

"There's some mystery here," decided Bob Dexter. "I wonder if it has anything to do with the lighthouse? I wish I could find out. I'm going to keep my ears and eyes open. It's mighty strange."

Captain Blackford appeared to understand that the boys had come to hear the story of the shipwreck. For after thanking them for what they had done for Nate Simpson, the strangely missing member of the crew, he launched into the tale.

"We were on our way from South America to Halifax when we ran into this hurricane off your beach," related the captain of the *Sea Hawk*. "It was a hurricane, too, out there, though you don't seem to have had it quite as hard on shore. It struck us all of a sudden, and before we knew it we were on the rocks. There was nothing we could do then, except signal for help, and I must say it came mighty quick and mighty good," he added.

"We aim to keep on the job at all times," spoke Captain Hanford, modestly enough.

"May I ask a question?" inquired Bob, and, later, his two chums said they thought he was going to ask why it was that Joe Norton was so anxious to have the black-bearded Simpson located.

"Ask as many as you like, son," spoke the captain of the wrecked schooner.

"Did the going out of the lamp in the lighthouse

have anything to do with you piling up on Shark Rock?" asked the boy.

"I reckon it did!" declared Abel Short, with vindictive triumph in his voice. "If old Amos hadn't gone to sleep the light never would have gone out, and you'd 'a' been warned away from Shark Rock."

"No, I can't say that," spoke the commander. "We picked up Beacon Beach light at the proper time, and I got my bearings from it. I also saw the red warning light on the rock itself. Oh, I knew where I was, all right, but with the wind blowing at the rate it was—seventy-five miles an hour if it was a foot—and with our auxiliary engine going dead, and the rudder going out of commission, we couldn't do anything else but strike."

"And strike we did!" muttered Joe Norton.

"Strike we did!" echoed Captain Blackford. "No, it can't be blamed on the light, though I was surprised, just as we struck, to see it go out. But that had nothing to do with our misfortune."

"I'm glad to hear that," spoke Bob. "The lighthouse keeper is worried for fear the government inspector will blame him for your trouble."

"He can't!" declared Captain Blackford. "I'll tell him differently if he asks me. The failure of the light had nothing to do with it."

"Mr. Wendy will be glad to hear that," remarked Ned.

"Hum!" sneered Abel Short. "If Amos didn't

cause the wreck of the *Sea Hawk* he'll be the means of another sooner or later. He isn't fit to have charge of the Beacon Beach light."

Some of the life savers chuckled, for well they knew the spirit of rivalry and animosity between the two old men. They did not seem altogether to hold with Abel, though he was of their number.

"No, it was just a combination of bad luck that landed us on Shark Rock," went on Captain Blackford. "But we struck hard—mighty hard."

"Maybe it was the shock of striking that threw Mr. Simpson overboard and hurt his head," suggested Harry.

"Maybe," said the captain, and Bob saw him make a slight motion toward Joe Norton, as though to command continued silence on the part of that peppery individual.

"Well, and so we were wrecked," resumed the captain. "A good schooner she was, too—the *Sea Hawk*. I haven't had a chance to go out and look at her since she piled up on the rocks, but I'm afraid she's done for," and his voice was sad. "Must have a hole big as a house in her bottom, and she'll soon pound to pieces in these seas."

"She won't last long," commented Captain Hanford. "I suppose you have sent word to the insurance company," he added.

"Well, I told my partners to in the telegram I sent them," the captain stated. "I own part of her."

"Were you bringing any snakes or wild animals up from South America?" asked Ned, making an inquiry that had been on his lips for the last ten minutes.

"Animals—snakes—no!" chuckled the captain, mirth, for the first time, seeming to find vent within him. "We were bringing up some specimens of rare ore and chemicals for a firm in Halifax. But I guess there's little left of it," he added. "Well, it can't be helped—it's the fortune of the sea. 'Tisn't the first time I've been wrecked, either, though this is the first time it was ever so near shore. Sort of makes me feel ashamed to land in somebody's front yard, so to speak," and he motioned to Shark Rock which, by a stretch of the imagination, might be said to be in the "yard" of the life saving station.

"But it was mighty handy to know we were connected by shore with that breeches buoy when the waves were washing over the deck," said one of the sailors.

"You're right there," came from Captain Blackford. "We'll never get over feeling thankful to your men," he said to Captain Hanford. "One time I thought we were sure all booked for Davy Jone's locker. But you saved us."

"That's our business. It's all in the day's work," was the simple comment of the life saving captain.

"Well, boys, that's the story of the wreck—at least enough of it to let you know how it happened,"

went on the commander of the *Sea Hawk*. "We're alive, and that's about all, but we're mighty thankful for that. And you can tell the lighthouse keeper that he wasn't at all to blame."

"He'll be glad to know that," commented Ned.

They remained about the station for some little time longer, listening to the talk of the seamen, some of whom related brief but exciting stories of other wrecks in which they had figured.

"But this is the first time I ever remember of a messmate being shipwrecked on land," commented one grizzled sea-dog.

"Meanin' who?" asked a companion.

"Meanin' Nate Simpson," was the answer. "He gets ashore safe, and then he disappears with the yellow boys."

"Stow that talk! Mind what the captain said," muttered Joe Norton. "If he wouldn't let me talk —he won't you! Clap a stopper on, Lute."

"All right," growled the other.

"Say, what do you reckon all this means?" asked Harry of his two chums as they walked away.

"Give it up," spoke Ned. "But he must have meant gold when he said 'yellow boys.' That's what they call gold nuggets."

"They wouldn't be bringing gold nuggets from South America," said Bob. "There isn't any gold to speak of down there. If it was ancient Mexico,

that would be another story. Or if it was silver from the Andes mountains—but not gold."

"What did that fellow mean, then, by Simpson disappearing with the yellow boys?" asked Ned.

"Maybe we'll find out later on," reasoned Bob. "But I'm glad they can't blame the wreck on Mr. Wendy. Let's go tell him it's all right. It will be good news to him."

"And then let's go fishing," proposed Harry. "I'd like some fried fish and bacon for supper."

"All right—just order what kind of fish you want and I'll have them bite for you," laughed Ned.

They found Amos Wendy showing the light apparatus to the town electrician, and the two of them were going over wires, switches and connections, endeavoring to find out the reason why the thermostat did not sound the alarm when it should have done so.

"We haven't found the trouble yet," stated the light keeper. "But I certainly am glad to know I wasn't to blame for the wreck. I hope the government inspector will believe that."

"He'll be told all right," declared Bob.

Promising to call again, to learn the result of the electrician's visit, the lads went back to their camp and, having prepared their poles and lines, embarked in a boat they hired from Jerry Tonk, and put out into the bay.

"Weak fish ought to be biting well now," commented Mr. Tonk.

He was always encouraging that way—especially to those who rented his boats.

Soft, or shedder crabs, formed the bait the boys took with them to entice the weak fish to their hooks. It was said the finny prizes could not resist these toothsome morsels of hard crabs which, having shed their outer casement for a new and larger one, are in a sort of plastic state for a time—very easy for fish to eat.

"Well, we'll see who'll get the first one!" called Harry, as he threw his baited hook over the side. Hardly had it touched the water than the bait was taken with a fierce rush of some inhabitant of the deep.

So sudden was the attack that the pole was almost jerked from Harry's grasp, and in bending forward, the better to maintain his grip, the lad leaned too far. A moment later he went over the side.

"Man overboard!" shouted Ned, casting aside his pole to make a dive for his chum.

CHAPTER XI

BOB DISAPPEARS

"STEADY, boy! Steady!" shouted Bob Dexter, for the sudden tipping of the boat to one side, when Harry went overboard, coupled with the motion given the craft as Ned got ready for a rescue act, almost tossed Bob into the salty waters of the bay.

"Steady she is!" announced Ned a moment later, as he saw his chum's head rise close to the boat. "Can you make it?" he called to Harry. For if the latter was all right, and not entangled in his line and pole, Ned knew Harry could easily swim back so he could grasp the gunwhale.

"S-s-ure, I'm—all—right!" answered Harry, shaking his head to get the water out of his eyes. He had known enough to take a long breath and then keep his mouth closed as he felt himself going over the side, and, consequently, was no worse off than any one who dives into the water—save that he had all his clothes on.

"Good! Then I needn't wet my Sunday suit!" announced Ned, and at this Bob chuckled, for Ned had on his oldest clothes, as, indeed, had all three

chums, donning these as the best sort of garments for a day's fishing in an open craft.

Harry struck out for the boat, being but a few feet from it, and grasped the gunwhale, or "gunnel," as a true sailorman would call it. He supported himself easily on it, not endeavoring to pull himself up over the side, as a less practiced swimmer might try to do in the fear that, unless he did, he would sink again.

But had Harry pulled hard on the side of the boat where he grasped it, and had he endeavored to climb over the side, he would have overturned the craft, since, in their eagerness to see what was happening their chum, both Ned and Bob were on that side of the boat.

"Wait a minute," advised Bob, when he saw that Harry was all right. "We'll get on the other side and balance her, and then you can climb in."

This the two in the boat did, for such was the most approved method—one they had been instructed in when at a Boy Scout camp some years before, when canoe tilting and rescue work was among the many excellent things taught.

Leaning away from Harry, and over the opposite side of the bobbing craft, Ned and Bob counterbalanced the weight of their chum who, a moment later, easily hoisted himself, dripping water at every point, over the side.

"Careful now!" cautioned Bob with a laugh. "Don't do the dog act, my boy."

"Dog act—what do you mean?" demanded Harry, with just the trace of indignation in his voice.

"I mean, don't shake yourself, the way old Ben Hutson's Newfoundland dog used to do," went on Bob.

"That's right!" chimed in Ned. "Say, do you remember how he used to fall in, like a ton of brick, whenever you chucked a stick in the water for him to bring out. And then, when he brought it to you, and laid it down for you to throw in again, he'd give himself a shake like one of those electric vibrators and he'd present you with a shower bath."

"That's what I didn't want Harry to do," explained Bob, also with a chuckle. "One wet in a day is enough."

"Oh, don't worry," mumbled Harry, a trifle grumpy over what had happened. "I'm not going to wet you. But I'm going to get off some of these wet things."

"How'd it happen?" asked Ned, as Harry sat down on his seat in the boat, and proceeded to take off his sneaks and socks, preparatory to divesting himself of his soaking trousers.

"A big fish—must have been a shark—took the bait so suddenly I didn't have time to get a good grip on the pole," Harry explained. "And I went overboard—that's all."

"Did you think you could grab the fish by his chin whiskers and choke him to death?" asked Bob.

"Never mind what I thought," responded the recently immersed one. "I got the first bite, all the same."

"And the first bath—of its kind!" chuckled Ned.

"That's all right—I'm not the only one who needs a bath," countered Harry, "and if——"

He paused as he removed his second leg from the wet and soggy trousers and then suddenly made a dive for the side of the boat.

"Hold on there!" shouted Bob. "What's the idea?"

"Going overboard again?" demanded Ned.

Such, indeed, for a moment, seemed Harry's intention. But he had another object in view. For he had seen what the other boys had not seen—and this was his fishing pole floating close to the craft. And, not only was the pole floating, but it was jerking about in a very telltale manner. The pole, a light one of split bamboo, had a handle of cork, which buoyed it up, even with the weight of the reel.

"He's on! He's on!" cried Harry, as he reached for and grasped the cork handle of his rod, and began to reel in. "Hurray! It's a big one and he didn't get off!"

It was apparent to his chums, as they saw the taut line which extended down into the water, that a fish was still on the hook. Whether it was the same big

one that had caused Harry to take an involuntary bath, or another that had tackled the bait when the first fish sheered off was impossible to say. But, undoubtedly, there was a fish on Harry's line, in spite of the fact that he had relinquished it, perforce, for a time.

In wonderment Ned and Bob watched their chum as he reeled in. Nor was it any easy work, for the fish was giving him a fight, darting this way and that below the rippling surface of the bay in an endeavor to shake out the hook.

But it had taken the bait too fiercely, and the barb was too deeply imbedded to allow of this. And, gaining, inch by inch on his line, as he reeled it in, Harry, at last brought his prize to the side of the boat.

"A big blue! Net him! Net him, Bob!" Harry pleaded.

"Net him I will!" cried the delighted Bob, almost as glad over Harry's luck as though it was his own. "Steady, now."

Most of the fight, however, was taken out of the bluefish, for such it was, and a moment later it lay flapping in the bottom of the boat.

"A dandy!" cried Ned. "A Jim-dandy, Harry!"

"Not so bad," modestly admitted Harry, as he proceeded to get off the remainder of his wet garments, while Bob disentangled the line and took the

hook from the mouth of the fish, which he mercifully killed by a blow on top of the head.

"Is that the way you always catch bluefish?" asked Bob, as he put the prize in a pail and covered it with seaweed, after having first cleaned it to insure of it being kept as fresh as possible.

"Always! It's the latest style of catching blues," announced Harry with as grave a face as Bob's in asking the jolly little question.

"Well, I'm not going to try it," announced Ned, as he proceeded to reel in to look at his bait. For neither he nor Bob had paid much attention to their tackle during the excitement caused when Harry went over the side.

"Me either," agreed Bob.

Harry laid his outer garments on the small seat in the bow of the craft, and proceeded to do the remainder of his fishing in his underwear, which, as it turned out to be a hot day, was just the right sort of outfit, he declared.

"The sun and wind will soon dry my clothes," he said. "And it doesn't much matter if they are a bit damp."

"I'll say they're damp, all right," announced Ned. "But you're a lucky guy for all that."

"Nothing being heard to the contrary I'll declare the motion carried," spoke Bob, and it was such a correct imitation of the rather stilted manner of

Harvey Thomas, head of the Boys' Athletic Club, of Cliffside, that his two chums laughed.

"I'm glad Harvey isn't along now," remarked Ned with a chuckle. "He wouldn't stand for Harry fishing in his underwear."

"You said it," announced Harry.

"Oh, Harvey's all right—when you know how to take him," stated Bob with easy good nature. "He certainly made a great speech when they gave me that dinner."

"Well, you deserved it," commented Ned. "After you solved the mystery of the Golden Eagle you could have been president of the club, if you'd wanted to."

"Nothing doing!" declared Bob, firmly.

"But what do you make of this Beacon Beach mystery?" asked Harry, who had resumed fishing as though nothing had happened. "What do you make of the light going out when there's nothing wrong with the apparatus? And what does it mean by Black Beard disappearing so strangely?"

"And what are the 'yellow boys,' I'd like to know!" came from Harry. "Why don't you get in some of your detective work, Bob, and let us in on the mystery?"

"I wish you fellows wouldn't call me a detective!" exclaimed Bob, a bit petulantly.

"Well, you are, aren't you?" demanded Harry.

"I want to be—when I get a bit older," admitted

the lad who had earned a well-deserved local title of "sleuth."

"You'll be it, all right," declared Harry. "And you can't have any stranger mystery to work on right now, than the disappearance of Nate Simpson."

"Black Beard, I call him," added Ned. "He looks like a modern pirate."

"Oh, I may have a go at it, after a while," said Bob easily. "Just now I'm here to fish. I think you've got a bite, Ned."

Ned had, and soon netted a good-sized weak fish, after which Bob himself caught one.

"But they aren't up to my blue," declared Harry, and neither they were, for a bluefish is a prize, indeed, these days, when this succulent fish has almost been driven from our shores.

Then interest centered in the fishing, for the boys had good luck, and Bob was glad of this, for it took the attention of his chums off a discussion as to his detective abilities, and also off the case of the disappearing shipwrecked man.

For, though he had said nothing to his chums about this, Bob had made up his mind to solve this mystery. That it was a mystery they had guessed as well as he. But they were not so well fitted to solve it.

I have told you, in the volume before this, something of Bob Dexter's talents. He was a natural

detective, though at first he had laughed good-naturedly when this title was applied to him.

Of course, you understand that at his age he was not a member of any police department, nor even a private detective agency. And he did not attempt any regular criminal work. But in several little affairs that had startled the small city of Cliffside, Bob had played an important part.

There was the case of Jennie Thorp, a child supposed to have been kidnaped, until Bob proved to the contrary. Before that there had been the disappearance of a valuable horse belonging to Richard Bellamy, and Bob had located that.

"It's just using common sense," Bob had said, when complimented on his work.

And now, almost as soon as the three chums had arrived at Beacon Beach on their vacation camping trip, another mystery was, so to speak, thrust under the very nose of Bob Dexter.

So you could not blame him, in view of what had happened in the past, if he said:

"I'll have a go at it!"

But he wanted to have this "go" in his own way, unhampered by any well-meant suggestions by his chums. Though he did not want them to know this.

Certainly there was something strange about the wreck of the *Sea Hawk* and the secret that seemed to exist among the captain and crew. Also there was the strange disappearance of the man with the

black beard—the one the boys had found lying on the beach.

"I don't believe the going out of the light had anything to do with the other queer happenings, though," Bob said to himself.

Just now, however, he was devoting more time to fishing than he was to solving mysteries, and his two chums, after the excitement caused by Harry's trip overboard, devoted themselves to pulling in weak fish.

For that is all they caught after the luck of landing one big blue, until, after a while, Bob said:

"We've got enough—let's quit."

"All right—I'm willing," agreed Harry, feeling of his clothes, and finding they were dry enough to don. "Got to look respectable going back to the dock," he remarked.

As they were pulling in toward shore they saw a boat, manned by a single rower, coming out, and when the craft drew near, it could be seen that the rower was Abel Short.

"Hello, Mr. Short!" greeted Bob. "Going out to do some life saving work?"

"Not exactly," was the answer. "I've got a few hours off and I'm going to do what you boys been doing—fish. Have any luck?"

"Fine!" answered Harry. "I got a big blue!"

"Good! That is luck!" cried the life guard. "They're mighty scarce of late."

"He had to dive for it and grab it by the tail!" laughed Ned.

"Oh, cut it out!" begged Harry. "You've rubbed it in enough."

"All right," subsided Ned.

Bob was observing Abel Short and the latter's craft, and some things that Bob saw caused him to do some deep thinking.

They landed, giving some of their fish to Jerry Tonk, for they had more than they needed. And then, after cleaning themselves, they prepared to bake the bluefish, after a recipe given them by Mr. Tonk.

"We're going to have one dandy little feed!" remarked Harry, as the savory odor of the baking fish escaped from the oven on top of the gas stove.

"You said it!" commented Bob.

The meal was fully up to expectations and after an early supper, the boys sat about camp, discussing the events of the day, and living over again the excitement caused by Harry.

"Where you going, Bob?" asked Ned, as his detective chum arose, and began to stroll down toward the beach.

"Oh, just for a little walk. Want to come?"

"Nothing doing!" announced Ned. "I'm too comfortable here."

"I'm with you," came from Harry. "Rest for the hard-working fishermen!"

So it happened that Bob strolled off by himself, for which he was not at all sorry, as he had a certain object in view. He made no secret of it, however, but wended his way to the life saving station, and reached there in time to see Abel Short return to report for duty.

"Any luck fishing, Mr. Short?" asked Bob.

"Luck? No, didn't get a nibble!"

"That's queer," remarked Bob. "They bit mighty well for us."

"Wa'al, then you had all the luck," commented the life saver with a chuckle.

"Guess you didn't go to the right place," went on Bob. "Maybe the fish were frightened away from the wreck on Shark Rock."

"Who says I was fishing out at Shark Rock?" quickly demanded the life saver, and he gave a hasty look around, as though he did not want any of his companions to overhear Bob's words.

"I thought I saw your boat out there as I was coming over here," went on Bob.

"Must have been somebody else," declared Mr. Short. "Never has been any good fishing around Shark Rock that I know of. Must have been somebody else."

"Maybe," admitted Bob, but to himself he added: "You went out there, all right, I'm sure of it. But what for—that's the question. What for? Well, I'm going to find out."

Abel Short hauled his boat up on the sand, out of reach of high tide. The sea was so smooth that a canoe could have been launched from the beach with safety now, though ordinarily it was necessary for fishing boats to put out from the bay where Bob and his chums had embarked.

"No, I wasn't doin' any fishin' out at Shark Rock," Abel said, as he went up to the station.

"Not fishing, perhaps, but you were doing something out there," Bob thought to himself.

It still being early, he, also, went to the life saving headquarters. There he learned that Captain Blackford's wife and some members of the crew had departed, Mrs. Blackford going to her mother's house until her husband had made arrangements about seeing if anything could be saved from the wreck. Joe Norton alone of the crew remained, he having been first mate.

"Did you hear anything of Nate Simpson?" asked Bob.

"Not a word," replied the captain. "Guess he must have gone loony and be wandering back in the woods."

"We'll find him!" declared Joe, fiercely. "We've got to find him and——"

"Ahem!" coughed Captain Blackford loudly, and Joe broke off his remarks suddenly.

"Some of my partners are coming down to look at the wreck in a few days," went on the captain.

"But I don't reckon there'll be anything worth saving."

"Probably not," agreed Bob. "Minerals don't float, as a rule."

He made his way back to camp, finding Ned and Harry almost asleep in their chairs in front of the tent, so lazily tired were they from the exertions of the day.

"Better turn in, I reckon," commented Bob, saying nothing of what he had heard down at the station.

"We were just waiting for you, to be polite," yawned Ned.

"Don't you think it's a bit early to hit the hay?" asked Harry.

"What's the idea of staying up any later?" demanded Ned. "I don't see anything very exciting going on here."

"No, but maybe we could find something," went on Harry.

"A movie, or something like that, eh?" chuckled Bob. "The nearest movie is five miles from here, and they'll be showing films that came out of the ark. I'm with you, Ned—me for a snooze."

"Do you think any one might come around the camp in the night?" Harry asked. "Do you think we'd better stand watch?"

"Who would come around here, for the love of

stamps?" cried Ned. "We haven't got anything worth taking. You're crazy, Harry!"

"Well, then I guess I'm in good company," chuckled the other as he began to undress.

And a little later all three were stretched out on their cots.

"I say!" cried Harry next morning, as the sun awoke him by shining into his eyes through an opening in the tent, "whose turn to make the coffee?"

"Mine, I guess—worse luck!" mumbled Ned. "Ugh! I could sleep for another couple of years, I believe."

"Well, you aren't going to!" laughed Harry, as, with a quick motion, he pulled most of the bedclothes from his chum's cot. "Get up! Ho, Bob! Grub time and it's Ned's turn!" he shouted.

Both lads looked toward where Bob slept. To their surprise his cot was not occupied.

"Bob's up!" exclaimed Ned, hastily rising and stretching.

"Maybe he went down for a swim," suggested Harry.

Ned looked down toward the beach.

"He isn't there," he reported.

"That's queer," spoke Harry. "He doesn't often get up ahead of time like this and disappear."

"Well, he's disappeared, all right," went on Ned, as he quickly dressed and looked around.

CHAPTER XII

ANXIOUS MOMENTS

HARDLY able to account for it, both lads reluctantly admitted that they were apprehensive lest something had happened to Bob Dexter. There was something a bit strange, they told each other, about his having risen so early, and having gone off without awakening them to tell them where he was going.

"And he didn't leave a message, or anything," went on Harry, looking about the tent.

"No, that's the funny part of it," stated his chum. "He often gets up before we do—I mean other times when we've been camping together—but always before he's left some word."

"Maybe he forgot it this time," suggested Harry. "Let's go down to the beach and see if he's in swimming. He might be taking a bath to get up an appetite for breakfast."

"That's something I don't need," observed Ned.

"Which—an appetite or a bath?" asked Harry.

"Neither one. I've got the appetite and I had a swim last evening after we came back from fishing. But Bob may be in the water. His bathing suit's

gone," he added as he looked out on the line behind the tent, where the suits were, customarily, hung to dry.

"But he's got his knock-about suit on," reported Harry, as he pointed to where Bob's garments hung. And both lads noticed that his old clothes, those used for fishing and tramping, were not with the other suits.

"Looks like he'd gone off dressed in his knock-abouts and had taken his bathing suit with him in case he felt like a swim," was Ned's conclusion.

"Guess you're right," came from the other. "Well, he knows his own business best, I guess. If he had wanted us to know what he was going to do he'd have told us," and there was a trifle of feeling in Harry's words.

"Oh, Bob's all right!" declared Ned. "No use us getting on our ears because he takes an early morning sneak. I only hope he's all right—that's all."

"What do you mean—all right?" quickly asked Harry. "Could anything happen him?"

"You never know what's going to happen in the ocean," spoke Ned. "There was that cuttle fish that squirted out black ink. They say those chaps are only little fellows—but supposing a big one happened to come along—or even an octopus?"

"Nonsense!" scoffed Harry.

"Well, a shark then!" persisted Ned. "There

must be sharks around here or they wouldn't have named that Shark Rock where the wreck is."

"Don't be silly!" commanded Harry, but, at the same time, he confessed, afterward, that he put in some anxious moments while Ned was thus bringing up dire possibilities.

"Let's have some bacon and coffee, and then take a look around," suggested Ned, when a hasty survey of the beach had not disclosed their missing chum. "Maybe he's over at the life saving station. Very likely he is—working on the mystery."

"Maybe," admitted the other. "Well, let's have grub."

They did not spend much time over the meal, but they would, it is probable, have spent less time if they could have seen what their chum, Bob Dexter, was doing while they were eating.

For Bob had arisen early—very early, while it was hardly yet daylight, and he had moved about the tent with such stealth that he did not awaken either of his chums.

"Though if they do wake up, and spot me, I'll say I'm going out for an early swim," thought Bob to himself. "And I am going to swim—that's true enough."

But he had another object in view.

He had made his plan the night before, and had laid out his clothes where he could easily don them with a minimum amount of effort. In his rough suit

—the one reserved for fishing and tramping—he softly emerged from the tent and took his bathing trunks and jersey from the line. Then he walked down to the small dock, in the bay, where Jerry Tonk had his modest express office, and where, also, the old man had a fleet of more or less reliable boats tied up.

"I'll take one and pay him for it later," said Bob to himself as he cast his eyes over the "fleet," and picked out a craft he decided would best suit his purpose. He did not want to use the boat he and his chums had hired for a term of weeks from Mr. Tonk, and that skiff was left on the beach just below where the tent was pitched on top of the sand dunes.

It was because their boat was still at its mooring place that Ned and Harry could not quite fathom which way Bob had gone—whether by land or sea. But the young detective had purposely thus left them in the dark.

Bob had brought with him a "snack" of lunch—some cold corn bread and bacon, and this he proceeded to munch as he made his way down among the boats of Mr. Tonk.

"Some hot coffee would go better than this milk," remarked Bob to himself, as he drained some of the white fluid from a bottle he had filled at the tent. "But I'll get a real meal later."

Thus fortified by a rather meager breakfast, he took his place in the boat, stowing his bathing suit

in the bow, and proceeded to pull out into the bay, and around the point into the open ocean.

There was no wind. It was a calm, still morning, and just suited to Bob's purpose.

"There's hardly any swell on," he remarked to himself while sculling out. "No danger at all, as far as I can see. And I don't believe there are any sharks out there."

From which, if you are even one-tenth as good a detective as Bob was credited with being, you can guess his destination.

There was rather more motion to the water, after he had passed out beyond the point, than there had been in the sheltered bay, but it would have been safe even in a canoe, Bob found.

And of this he was glad, for he had some ticklish work ahead of him. Rather rash was his undertaking. But then youth is ever bold and rash, which accounts for its accomplishments.

Once beyond the point and where he could get a view of the wreck of the *Sea Hawk,* still impaled on the teeth of Shark Rock, and also where he could see the lighthouse and the life saving station, Bob Dexter eagerly scanned the surface of the sea to make sure that he had the expanse of water to himself.

"Not a soul out!" he told himself, with some exultation. "I have it all alone. It's good I came early."

He was very early. The sun was not yet up, though a dim, rosy light in the east, where sky and water seemed to meet, told where Old Sol would soon arise.

"Not even the pound net fishermen have started yet," went on Bob, talking to himself, as he pulled along. He had taken a light boat, which would not have been exactly safe had there been any sea on. But the lad had chosen his time well. The sea was like the proverbial mill pond.

Now, had any one been observing him, Bob Dexter could have been seen heading straight for the wreck on Shark Rock. But he was not observed. For though ever wakeful vigilance is supposed to be part of the stock in trade of the life savers, so calm was the weather that the man on duty in the observing tower of the Beacon Beach station was taking a pardonable "forty winks" after his night of duty.

Nor was Amos Wendy, in his lighthouse, looking out. For with the first rays of dawn the light had gone out automatically, the gas being shut off by a sort of alarm clock arrangement.

"I'll have the place to myself," chuckled Bob, as he bent his back to the ashen oars and pulled lustily toward the wreck.

There she lay—what was left of the *Sea Hawk*—a grim reminder of the strength and fury of the angry sea. It was the closest Bob had been to the stranded schooner, and as he came on he could see

that she had been fairly caught on the sharp rock. The great waves had lifted her up and then had dropped her down, so that she had "broken her back," to use the proper term.

Bow and stern parts lay on either side of a dividing ridge of rocks. All the masts were broken off close to the decks, and that part of these not under water were cluttered with broken timber, tangled ropes and torn sails. To part of the broken mizzen mast was still fastened, well up above the shattered rail, part of the rope which had been shot out, that night of the storm, by the life savers.

"She sure is a wreck," murmured Bob, as he tied his boat to the partly submerged bow. "No salvage here, I'd say. But I'm going to have a look around. And I can see some things, under water that I can't out of water, I reckon."

With that he began undressing, and soon was in his bathing suit. Then he tested the warmth of the water, by thrusting in one bare foot.

"Not so bad," he murmured. "I thought it would be cold. But it isn't. Now for a dive!"

Before doing this, however, Bob Dexter narrowly observed the surface of the sea all about the rock. Though he had had no experience with sharks, he had read of a certain triangular fin that would appear above the top, when the great fish was swimming high.

He was relieved, now, to see none of these. Not

that he really thought he would, for the life savers had said that rarely were these sea tigers seen in this locality.

Satisfied with his observation, Bob proceeded to let himself over the side of his boat. Once in the water, after the first shock of such an early morning dip, he felt a sense of elation and a reaction such as follows a shower bath after good exercise.

"Now to see what I can find!" thought Bob to himself as, taking a long breath, he began to swim beneath the sea.

That is why I say, had his chums, peacefully eating breakfast back in the tent, seen him at this moment, they would have been under even more apprehension than they were.

CHAPTER XIII

BLACK BEARD

"WELL, let's go!" exclaimed Ned, finishing his second cup of coffee. For, though the sea was warm the air was cold, and the hot coffee was a grateful beverage to the two lads in camp. The natural phenomenon of cold air and warm water is often observed at the seashore.

"Go where?" asked Harry, as he cleaned his plate of the last of the bacon and eggs, for this filling and easily prepared breakfast dish had been hit on by the lads as one most proper under the circumstances.

"Let's go find Bob," went on Ned. "It's about time he was heading back here, I'm thinking. I don't like this at all, Harry."

"You mean his going off as he did?"

"Sure. Why should he do it?"

"Well, you know Bob Dexter's queer when he's working on a detective case."

"Is he working on this case?" demanded Ned.

"Of course he is!" answered Harry, rising from his camp stool. "Did you ever know Bob Dexter

not to get mixed up in a mystery if there was one within a dozen miles of him?"

"Guess not," was the admission cautiously given.

"Right-o! And this mystery is next door, so to speak."

"Well, even if Bob is queer, and he is, I'll admit, for he acted funny when he was on the trail of the Golden Eagle, that's no excuse for him going off while we're asleep, and leaving no word to tell us where he went," stated Ned.

"Yes, he might have left a note—or something," agreed Harry. "But when he comes back he'll have some good excuse—you can depend on that."

"You said it!" chimed in Ned, heartily.

"And, most likely, he'll laugh at us for being worried," went on the other. "And I don't mind saying I am a bit worried. That devil fish scare, and the idea of sharks——"

"Let's don't think about them," advised Ned. "We'll go down to the life saving station and see if he's there. Probably he is."

The two lads decided to let the "housework" of their camp wait until their return, so, piling up the dirty dishes, and fastening the flap of their canvas house to keep out dogs and other intruders other than two-footed ones, Ned and Harry started down the path that led from the sand dunes to the beach below them.

They had reached the level, and were starting out

around the path which followed a bend in the coast caused by the jutting out of the point forming the bay, when some one hailed them.

"Hello, you camp boys!" called a voice.

Ned and Harry turned to behold Jerry Tonk waving a grizzled hand at them, and he approached on the run—that is, as much of a run as he was capable of, his white chin whiskers fluttering in the early morning air.

"What's the matter?" asked Harry, and, later, he said he felt a sense of fear, lest Mr. Tonk be the bearer of ill tidings regarding Bob.

"Any of you boys borrow a boat of mine?" Mr. Tonk wanted to know. "My little dory is missing, and I thought maybe you'd taken it. It's all right if you did," he hastened to say. "You're customers of mine, and you're welcome to any boat I got. But I just wanted to make sure you had it."

"We didn't take it—there's our boat there," and Harry pointed to one they had hired for their camping season.

"But maybe Bob did," went on Ned. "He got up early this morning, and slipped out before we were awake," he reported to the boat owner. "Probably he took your dory. But he'll pay for it."

"Oh, I wa'n't worryin' about that!" laughed Mr. Tonk, and his chuckling waved his chin whiskers up and down after the manner of a goat munching bill posters for a meal. "Long as I know he has it—

why it's quite all right with me, boys, bein's you're customers of mine."

"We aren't exactly *sure* Bob has your boat," went on Ned. "But he got up early, and went out with his bathing suit. Maybe he's gone fishing and he wanted to be ready in case a big blue pulled him overboard," he concluded with a look at Harry.

"That's all right," went on Mr. Tonk. "Just tell him to pull the boat up above high watermark when he brings her back. He's welcome to her as long as he likes."

The boatman, apparently satisfied, even with this partial explanation, went on with his work, that of preparing his other craft against possible hiring that day, while Ned and Harry, satisfied that they now had some clew to Bob's disappearance, continued on to the life saving station.

"Though he wouldn't get in a boat to go there," said Harry.

"No, 'tisn't likely," remarked Ned. "Still you can't tell. Maybe he wanted to try some fishing around Shark Rock," he added.

"He didn't take his tackle—I saw it in the tent!" spoke Harry. This seemed to dispose of that theory. "Besides," added the youth, "he almost laughed at Abel Short fishing off where the wreck is, so it isn't likely he'd try there."

"Guess you're right," admitted Ned. "But it

won't do any harm to go down to the station. We can see the wreck from there."

"That's so. Well, let's go."

Again they headed for the life saving station, out of sight from where they stood, but not far away. The bend in the coast, a bend formed by a great ledge of undersea stone of which Shark Rock was an outcropping, hid the station from sight.

But before the lads had gone very far they were again halted by a hail—again from Jerry Tonk.

"Hey, you campers!" he cried, evidently not remembering their names.

"What is it?" called back Ned.

"Want I should get your mail?" asked the old salt. "I'm going in to th' post office purty soon."

"Yes, get it, please," begged Ned.

"Kind-hearted old codger," remarked Harry to his chum, as, once more, they took up their journey.

"I'll say he is! Everybody around here's pretty decent. The only grouch at all is that Abel Short."

"And he hasn't a grudge against anybody but Amos Wendy," chuckled Harry.

"Guess that's a quarrel of long standing," remarked Ned. "But I do hope Bob turns up soon. If he's gone out in that little dory, he may get into trouble."

"Not with the sea like this," commented the other. "It's like glass."

"Yes, but a storm can come up in a minute. Look

how it was the night we came down. Not a sign of a storm even after we got here. But as soon as we began putting up the tent there was a queer look in the air, and then came that hurricane—on short notice."

"But a dory's the safest boat you can be in when there's a storm," stated Harry. "Give me a dory every time."

"Even a dory isn't any good if she starts to leak or gets stove in by being whanged against Shark Rock," spoke Ned. "I just wish Bob was back here!"

"Oh, well, there isn't a sign of a storm now, and won't be in several hours," went on Harry. "By that time Bob'll be back—sure. He'll get hungry —that's the best way to tell he'll soon be back."

"Maybe it is," agreed the other. "Well, there's plenty of help in case anything happens," he added, and he motioned to the station of the life savers, which was just merging into view as they went up a little rise in the cluster of grass-covered sand dunes, amid which grew some stunted pine trees.

"I should think those fellows would get tired of this sort of life," went on Ned.

"Which fellows?" asked his chum.

"The life savers. Golly, but it must be fierce down here in a winter's storm! And in summer it's so deadly dull!"

"Maybe they get used to it," suggested Harry.

"They say you can get used to anything—even being in jail, you know."

"It's almost as bad as being in jail—cooped up here, I should think," proceeded Ned. "I like the seashore, but a few weeks, or a month, at most, is enough for me. And to have to stay here all your life would put the kibosh on me for fair. Golly, yes!"

Harry was about to reply when his attention was attracted by some movement, or commotion, in a dense growth of rank grass near one of the stunted trees. At first the lad thought it was a dog, and he was just getting ready to utter a friendly whistle to the canine, when Ned caught his chum's arm and exclaimed:

"Look!"

At the same time he pointed to some object emerging from the tangle of grass. The object was a man —a man crawling on all fours, like some animal. And as his head emerged from the green, waving stems of grass, Harry tensely whispered:

"Black Beard!"

It was, indeed, the strangely missing man from the wreck!

CHAPTER XIV

AT THE WRECK

BOB DEXTER was an excellent swimmer, and a diver of no mean attainments. He had acquired proficiency in the latter sport by much practice in Lake Netcong, and once, during a carnival of water sports, had won the prize for his ability to stay longest under water.

With all that I don't mean to say that the young detective, to give him the title he modestly disclaimed, was equal to any of the pearl or sponge divers of the South Seas. Bob could not remain under any three or four minutes, but he had stayed under over two minutes once, and that is something, as you will agree if you have ever tried it. One minute is no mean record, and two something to boast of. Bob's best performance was a few seconds over two minutes.

"I wonder if I can do that now?" he asked himself as he went over the side of his small boat and swam down beneath the surface of the warm, calm sea in an endeavor to solve the mystery of the *Sea Hawk*.

For that there was a mystery connected with the wreck Bob was certain, and that it centered about something still on board, was his conviction.

"Those fellows may have brought some valuable mineral specimens up from South America," Bob told himself as he had rowed out to the wreck, "but they brought something else, too. Something that the mysteriously hiding Black Beard wants to get hold of, and something that Captain Blackford and Joe Norton don't want him to get. That's why Captain Blackford is staying on. It's all bosh, his story of waiting for an examination of the wreck to see if anything can be saved. How can he save minerals that will sink to the bottom of the sea?

"No, there's something queer out at that wreck and I'm going to find out what it is if I can. I only hope I can stay under long enough really to get sight of something that will give me a clew."

Bob was prepared for anything when he made his dive. That is, he was prepared to discover anything in connection with the wreck. Many strange stories flitted through his mind as he made his way by strong swimming down into the depths alongside of the rock that had nipped the *Sea Hawk*. It would not have surprised the young sleuth to have discovered traces of some great crime.

I think you will agree with me that Bob was a bit too sensational in his desire to discover something. A more experienced detective would have

surmised that it might have been a very ordinary sort of crime, or law evasion, that had to do with the wreck. And I venture to say, in these days, that a regular detective would have guessed at "bootlegging," to give a name to a most disgraceful trade.

But I might as well set at rest any guesses you have made in that direction by saying the *Sea Hawk* was not a rum-runner.

And when I say that Bob Dexter was prepared for anything he might discover when he made his dive at the wreck, I also include various forms of sea monsters. Bob would not have been a regular, human boy did he not have visions of being attacked by a giant shark, or having some slimy octopus reach out several of its eight sucker-armed legs to twine around him.

But in his less wildly speculative moments the lad knew that the chances were very much in his favor, and very much against seeing even a small devil fish. As for sharks, there might be big dog fish in those waters, but they are not voracious.

It is true there is a fish known as a horse mackerel (I have seen them as big as two barrels put together) which is credited with having nipped legs off daring swimmers. And I have watched big barracuda, some ten feet long, swimming about in warm waters. These fish are voracious, and stories are told of them attacking and killing swimmers.

They are of the pike variety. But they seldom, if ever, come as far north as New England.

So, take it all in all, Bob felt farily secure from the attack of any monster of the sea. Not so sure, however, was he that he would not be interfered with.

"If those sailors find out I'm diving around their wreck they may not like it," he reflected. "But I'm here, ahead of them now, and I'll find out all I can."

Down and down Bob forced himself, the light of the morning sun, now fully risen, growing dimmer and dimmer as he went down. However, he did not have very far to go before reaching a point where the keel of the *Sea Hawk* rested on Shark Rock. Bob had chosen to dive near the broken-off stern of the schooner, as he reasoned that the stern, where the captain's cabin was located, would be the place where anything of value would be kept.

As I have mentioned, the *Sea Hawk* "broke her back," shortly after striking on the rock, the uplifting motion of the waves, and their consequent receding, having let the ship fall with terrific force across a ridge of the rock that was located, as regards the schooner, just about amidships.

The stern was held up by coming to rest on a second ridge of rock some twenty feet under water, but the bow had settled into a deeper place, the rock there being less shelving. And, for the present, Bob was not interested in the bow, which held the fore-

castle, or place where the ordinary sailors had their berths. The captain and mate berthed aft. Just what the position of "Black Beard," or Nate Simpson, had been, Bob could only guess. He put him down, mentally, as a second mate.

At first Bob could see but little as he went deeper and deeper beneath the surface. But as the sun rose higher, more direct beams penetrated the water, and the boy's vision was better. Of course, you know that the light of the sun does not penetrate very far beneath the surface of any water, and when divers get below a certain depth, say a hundred feet, they can only go by feeling.

But Bob, attired in his bathing suit, was not going to attain any such depth as that. If he got down twenty feet he was satisfied, and this was deep enough. At that depth he had fairly good light, since the sun was shining in a cloudless sky.

After the first feeling of nervous fear, Bob found himself delighting in his undertaking. The sea was calm and warm, though he could not repress a start as a big fish brushed against his legs as he was descending.

"Gosh! I hope that isn't a shark!" thought Bob, swerving to one side and looking back.

But it was only a big, flat flounder which swerved away, like some white shingle being scaled through the water—for that's about as flat as a flounder is. And doubtless the fish was more frightened

than Bob, who would have laughed had he been up on the surface. But it is dangerous to laugh beneath water.

The objective of the lad was directly in front of the broken end of the stern. Swimming around the outer end of the stern, he knew, would tell him nothing, any more than if he had made the same sort of a visit while the schooner was whole and on the surface.

"But I want to get a look inside," Bob told himself.

With that end in view he worked his way down until he could catch hold of a jagged piece of wood and hold himself down. He was just below the deck of the *Sea Hawk,* and could look directly into what he took to be the captain's cabin, for it was better furnished than was a smaller one near it, and lying on lockers were nautical instruments, their metal weight holding them down. Bob was using less exertion now, for he did not have to swim to keep himself below the surface.

You realize, if you have done any diving at all, that the human body, being buoyant, and of less specific gravity than water, will float if left to itself and if air is kept in the lungs. So Bob would have popped up to the surface, soon after diving down, had he not forced himself toward the bottom by swimming.

But now, when he could reach out and grasp a

part of the wreck, he could hold himself down there beneath the surface, and not use up his energies by moving his arms and legs.

"Well, now let's see what there is to see," thought the lad to himself.

It isn't easy to make accurate observations under water, when one is holding his breath—when the lungs feel, every second, more and more like bursting with the restraint that is put upon them. But Bob had practiced this at home, and was fairly well equipped for his hazardous task.

That it was hazardous you can not doubt when you realize that if he should happen to be caught on any jagged part of the wreck, he might never come up. Out there, all alone, beneath the sea he would perish. And, having come off all alone, it might never be guessed what had become of him.

But the lad dismissed all these thoughts from his mind as he steadied himself by standing on a projecting plank that had formed part of the ship's bottom, and holding on to a portion of one of the *Sea Hawk's* ribs.

"I wish I might go in," mused Bob, as he stood thus, so to speak, on the very threshold of the captain's cabin. "But it's too risky, I guess. I might be caught inside."

The worst thing that can happen a diver, or, to speak more correctly, one of the worst things, is to be caught in some wreck he goes down to inspect.

It is almost certain death. Death not so quick nor so merciful, perhaps, as in the case of a swimmer unprovided with a diving suit, but death nevertheless. For unless a diver can free himself, and get out, he is certain to die, no matter how much fresh air is pumped to him.

And in the case of a swimmer like Bob, who was merely holding his breath, it would be a matter of only seconds were he to be caught in the cabin.

"So I guess I'll look at it from the outside," mused the lad, meaning from where he stood there beneath the surface of the ocean.

The light was growing stronger now, and by the golden beams which mistily penetrated the surface Bob could see a multitude of small fish swimming about. Some he knew—weaks, sea bass, the horrid toad fish, sea robins and flounders. Others he did not know the name of. Along the ledges of the rocks, and farther off, where the rock met the sandy shore of the ocean, could be seen big crabs and lobsters scuttling about. The latter moved backward, dragging their big claws after them. For a lobster swims by repeatedly folding his tail beneath him.

The crabs—big fellows with bright blue claws—moved sideways, and, occasionally swam upward by moving their back flippers, of which they have two.

"I hope none of them take it into their heads to come up and pinch me to see if I'm alive," mused

Bob. "Especially that big lobster. He's a giant!"

He was looking at an immense crustacean which must have weighed all of thirty pounds, and that is a "whale" of a lobster if you will take my word for it, and I have seen many of them, and eaten them, too, which is more to the point.

"One nip from him and I'd be all in," thought Bob, grimly.

But the fish, the crabs and the lobsters seemed to be minding their own business, which was the search of food. And from the fact that many small fish swam fearlessly about the wreck, Bob argued that no sharks, or other dangerous denizens of the sea, were near by.

"They don't even seem to be afraid of me," thought the lad.

Indeed the fish, after their first startled rush away as Bob settled himself into place, came swimming back, and some even flapped their tails in his face.

"Don't get fresh!" said Bob to himself, a sort of joke, it may be explained, in a sea that was all salt.

The lad now gave himself over to an intent inspection of what the broken open cabin of the captain presented to view. It was like looking in at a room on the stage, with the front wall shorn away to let the audience see.

"There's a chest I'd like to get a sight of in-

side," mused the young detective, as his eyes beheld a brass-bound one near the captain's berth. "I'll say that held the treasure—whatever it was—and maybe it does yet. Wonder if I dare go in and see if it's fast to the floor? I can't stand it down here more than a few seconds longer. I'll go up—get some fresh air and come down again."

Bob Dexter was almost at the limit of his endurance. His lungs felt like bursting.

He let go his hold on the ship's rib, and was about to give a kick that would send him shooting toward the surface when he became aware of a long, narrow black shadow passing over his head—between him and the open surface.

"A shark!" thought Bob, giving a quick and frightened glance upward.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE TRAIL

NED FULLER felt himself so suddenly pulled backward, and down amid the sand dunes that he thought, for a moment, he had stumbled. But a downward glance showed the lad it was his chum who had thus made him collapse, as it were, on their way to locate Bob.

"I say—what's the idea?" asked Ned.

"Quiet—not so loud!" cautioned Harry, even though Ned had, with some instinct of caution, spoken in a whisper, tense as it was.

"What's the matter?" Ned wanted to know, and this time his voice was even lower.

"He hasn't seen us yet—he's looking the other way," went on Harry, pointing toward the black-bearded man. "We can trail him."

"Do what?" asked Ned, for his chum had spoken in a low voice.

"Trail him—take after him—find out where he's been keeping himself."

"Oh, *trail* him!" and Ned emphasized the word he had not at first understood.

"Cut it out! Quiet!" begged Harry. "Don't spoil it all. We're in luck that he hasn't seen us!"

It was, as a matter of fact, only chance that turned the eyes of the mysterious black-bearded man the other way, just as the two boys, in their search for their missing chum, loomed into sight. Nate Simpson—that was the name he had been called by—was so intent, however, on carrying out his own plans, that it is doubtful if he thought anything about what others might be doing.

"He's crawling to where he can look down on the life saving station," whispered Ned, for the man had now swung about and was on his hands and knees, making his way through the tough, saw-toothed grass to the top of the little rise—a group of sand dunes that lifted themselves back of the station on Beacon Beach.

"Why, that's just where we're going," commented Harry. "But we'll wait a while now, until we see what his game is."

They hung back, concealing themselves by crouching down in the hollows of sand, and letting the grass wave above their heads. But they need not have feared discovery. "Black Beard" was paying attention to nothing except to his own progress. He had not seen the lads.

They watched him for several seconds, until he was almost out of their sight, and then Harry nudged his companion.

"Come on," he whispered.

"Where?" inquired Ned.

"We'll follow him as well as we can. Maybe he's going to do something desperate."

"Bosh!" silently laughed Ned. "More likely he just wants to see what's going on, and if he can spot any of his shipmates. There are but two left—if he only knew it—Captain Blackford and Joe Norton. I wonder why this fellow keeps shying away from them all the while?"

"Give it up," announced Harry, after thinking about it a moment or two. "We'll have to let Bob work on that end of the mystery. But maybe this Simpson has something the others want to get and he's keeping out of their sight."

"He's doing that all right—or trying to," said Ned. "But the question is—what has he got."

"Yellow boys!" said Harry, promptly.

"Gold? I don't believe it!" said the other. "There isn't enough of it in South America, Bob says. Anyhow, why would they be taking it to Halifax? They'd put in to New York with it, or to some New Jersey port, I should think."

"Well, we really don't know anything about it," was Harry's decision. "The only thing we do know is that this man has acted very strange since we carried him up the beach. He's hiding out like a criminal. Bob would certainly like to know about him, and since Bob is doing the detective work for

our crowd, we ought to find out where Black Beard is hiding and let Bob know."

"Sounds like a good idea," commented Ned. "He's out in the open all right now, though how long he'll stay there is another question. Now take it easy. Don't make any noise and follow as close as we dare."

Though the lads were not as skillful as was Bob Dexter in following a suspect, still Harry and Ned could do fairly well. They had had practice in playing "Indian," in their Boy Scout work, and they had spent many seasons camping in the woods.

So it is doubtful if the shipwrecked sailor, with his limited knowledge of land ways, was aware that he was being trailed. But such was the case.

On he crawled, along the sand, in and out amid the dunes and through patches of the tough grass. This last bit of the journey could not have been pleasant for him, and it certainly wasn't for Ned and Harry. The tough, serrated edges of the grass, like the blades of a hack saw, cut their hands and faces.

"It's all in the interests of science," commented Harry, when Ned had complained.

"Science! What science?" exclaimed the other.

"The science of detective work. We're doing this to get some clews for Bob."

"Well, I hope he appreciates it all right," remarked Ned as he looked at several bleeding

scratches on his hands, for the grass actually cut when it was rubbed against too sharply.

"He will," announced Harry. "But look—he's stopping now."

"He's got to the top of the rise where he can look down and see the station," was Ned's opinion. "We'd better not go any farther."

"Guess you're right," assented Harry. "We'll lay low until he turns around to come back. Then we can find out where he's been keeping himself."

"I reckon it's in some vacant fisherman's shanty along the shore—or back inland," said Ned. "And say—I've just thought of it, but maybe that's where Bob's gone!" exclaimed the boy.

"You mean scouting around to find this fellow?"

"Yes."

"But Bob went off in a boat—he took Tonk's dory."

"I know—but maybe he could make better time rowing along the coast, and then striking in. I wish I knew where Bob was."

"Oh, he'll soon be coming back," was Harry's comment.

The two lads remained for several minutes, hiding amid the sand dunes, and just within sight of the mysterious seaman who, having crawled like a snake to a vantage point, was looking down on the beach life saving station. What he saw, or what

he hoped to gain by this observation, the boys could only guess.

"There—he's coming back," whispered Harry, after a while. He had seen the figure, which had been motionless for some time, turn about—like some animal in its tracks.

"Lie low—wait until he gets past and then we'll trail him again," suggested Ned, now entering as fully into the spirit of the strange game as his chum had.

Simpson, as unaware, apparently, as before, of the presence of two keen-eyed lads so near him, slithered his way through sand and grass. It was a method of progress that the boys had to follow, for to stand up meant that they would be seen, should the sailor turn and look in their direction.

"I won't have any knees left after this trip," sighed Ned, as he followed in Harry's shadow.

"It's hard all right—but think what it may mean," came the encouraging reply.

For several hundred feet they followed the suspect thus through the sand and grass, until suddenly Harry, who was in the lead, gave a cry and seemed to topple down some declivity.

As a matter of fact that's just what he did. He had reached, unexpectedly, the top of a rather large dune, and the sand, being dry and shifting, had given way beneath his weight.

Thus he half fell and half rolled down the little

hill, and Ned was so close that he, too, followed. The boys bumped as they reached the bottom of the little slope together, and both cried out involuntarily.

"Well, I guess this spills the beans," remarked Harry ruefully, as he arose. "The bacon's burned all right now."

"I'll say it is!" agreed Ned.

"But it wasn't your fault," Harry was generous enough to add. "I did it myself. I ought to have been more careful."

"Well, maybe I had, too. Guess it's fifty-fifty. But maybe he didn't hear us—maybe he's in sight yet."

It was a vain hope. When they went cautiously to the top of the dune down which they had slid, there was no trace of the fugitive. And the wind was blowing about so, and the sand was so dry and shifting, that it was little use to try to follow in it the marks of hands and knees.

"He gave us the slip!" said Harry, ruefully.

"Our own fault, too," added the other. "But, anyhow, we know he's around here. Let's go down and tell the life savers."

"No, let's don't tell anybody but Bob," corrected his chum. "If this is a mystery let Bob get the credit of solving it. Don't say anything to the men from the *Sea Hawk,* or the life savers."

"All right—have it your own way. But I'd like

to find out where Bob is to tell him. Maybe he's down there," and Ned pointed toward the station, now out of sight.

"Maybe he is. We'll go around and find out."

Bob wasn't at the station, but it needed only a glance out toward the wreck to show a boat moored there.

"I guess he's there!" said Captain Hanford, when an inquiry was made of him. "We've been noticing that boat for the last few minutes. Haven't seen anything of a man or boy in it, though. But boats don't go off and make fast to wrecks by themselves."

"It's Jerry Tonk's little dory," announced one of the life savers who had been using a glass to view Shark Rock. "I'd know it a mile away."

"But why isn't Bob in it?" asked Harry, with a grim fear gripping his heart.

"Maybe he's taking a swim," said Jim Hart.

"We'll go out and take a look," said Captain Hanford. "I want to see if the wreck's in any way of breaking loose. If she does it will be a menace to navigation and I'll have to report it. Come along if you like," he invited Ned and Harry.

They very much liked, as you can imagine, and were eager to help the life savers launch the motor surf boat, an easy task in the calm sea then prevailing.

"Is Captain Blackford around?" asked Ned, as he and his chum followed the coast guard to the house where the motor craft was kept.

"No," answered Abel Short, "he and that queer mate of his went over to the village. They said they were going to get lodgings there. We aren't allowed to keep shipwrecked persons here, who have means to maintain themselves elsewhere," he explained lest it might be thought that the Beacon Beach coast guard was inhospitable.

"Are they coming back?" asked Ned.

"Oh, I reckon they won't go far away until the diver comes down," said Captain Hanford.

"Have they sent for a diver?" Harry wanted to know, and there was surprise in his voice.

"Yes, a regular deep-sea diver is coming down to take a look at the wreck," went on the captain. "Though what they can save from her I can't imagine. However, that's their business. All I want to make sure of is that she doesn't float off and drift in the way of other vessels. If she does I'll have to report it. Get ready now."

The staunch motor boat was soon launched, and Harry and Ned took their places in her, wading through a few little waves that gently patted, rather than smote the beach. The sea was very calm as they put off to the wreck.

"How do they get rid of a wreck, once she gets

afloat?" asked Ned, as they went chugging over the waves.

"Dynamite," answered the captain.

"Dynamite?" questioned Harry.

"Yes, they put a charge in her and blow her up so she sinks. A wreck that's sunk isn't dangerous to other vessels. But one that's a derelict—floating around goodness knows where—is about as bad a thing as another vessel can meet with—or collide with."

"Seems to me I read something about a government vessel that made a special business of blowing up derelicts," said Ned.

"Yes, there is such a vessel," said the captain. "We send in reports of floating wrecks—all steamship captains are also required to do so, and the wrecker goes cruising for them. The commander knows where they were last sighted and they make allowances for the drift. They're pretty clever at finding derelicts, those fellows. But this wreck is fast enough for the time being."

And, as they drew near they plainly saw Jerry Tonk's dory made fast to what remained of the *Sea Hawk*.

On and on chugged the life savers' craft until it was close to the wreck. And then Ned, looking over the side, cried:

"Look! There's Bob under the water!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE LIGHT OUT AGAIN

HARRY said, later, that at first, after Ned's startled cry, he thought his chum meant Bob had been drowned, and that Ned was looking at the lifeless body. But this idea prevailed for only a few seconds, as, almost immediately after Ned had uttered his cry. Bob shot out of the water, and, casting it from his eyes with a quick motion of his head, drew in several deep breaths and struck out for his boat.

That he was surprised to see several of the life savers and his two chums looking at him goes without saying. But that the others were surprised to see Bob is not quite so much in point. Since from the time Mr. Tonk's dory had been observed at the wreck, Ned and Harry had put two and two together, arriving at the conclusion that Bob was out at Shark Rock.

As, indeed, he was.

"Well, what's the idea?" asked Ned, when Bob had climbed aboard his own craft and sat, smiling, but panting for breath, at those in the motor craft.

"Oh—I—I just came out for a swim."

"A swim?" inquired Harry.

"Sure—to get up an appetite for breakfast. I hope you fellows left something."

"Well, you left us all right!" commented Ned. "We didn't know what had happened to you—sneaking off like that! Why didn't you leave a note, or something, if you wanted to go bathing before sunrise?"

"I did leave a note—right by the box of eggs!" declared Bob, a bit indignant that he should be suspected of deliberately causing his chums worriment.

"We didn't see it!" stated Harry.

"Well, I left it all right." And later the note we found in a corner of the tent, where a whiff of air had blown it. "Your boat gave me a scare," went on Bob, whose breathing was now normal.

"How's that?" asked Captain Hanford, whose practiced eye told him the wreck of the *Sea Hawk* was in no immediate danger of breaking away from Shark Rock. "Did you look up and think it was a whale?"

"Not exactly a whale—more like a shark," stated Bob. "All I could see, down where I was standing, was the shadow."

"Were you down there—near the bottom?" cried Ned in startled surprise.

"Not exactly on the bottom, but near it," an-

swered Bob. "I wanted to have a look at the wreck."

"Did you have it?"asked Abel Short, and there was a trace of eagerness in his voice. It was as though he would have asked, had he dared: "Did you find anything?"

"Yes, I got a good look at the stern," answered Bob. "I didn't try for the bow part yet."

"No, it wouldn't be there!" exclaimed Abel.

"What wouldn't?" asked Bob, sharply.

"Oh, I mean nothing worth saving would be in the fo'c'sle," explained Abel, in some confusion. "The captain's quarters would be aft, you know."

"Yes," said Bob, slowly, "I know."

"You aren't going down again, are you?" asked Ned, looking sharply at his chum.

"Oh, no. I've had enough," Bob replied. He would have added "for one morning," had he and his chums been by themselves. But Bob did not want his plans known. And it had been his plan to take another dive that very morning, had he not been interrupted as he was.

"Wa'al, I reckon you're hungry," said Captain Hanford with a smile, as he completed his survey of the wreck.

"Oh, I had some breakfast," stated Bob. "I knew it wouldn't do to sport about much in the water on an empty stomach. "But I'm ready to go back now."

"We'll tow you in—toss us your painter," offered Jim Hart, and when the mooring line of the dory had been made fast to the stern of the motor craft, Bob, sitting in his own private conveyance, was hauled close to shore.

"I'll row back around to the bay, thank you," he said, as the line was cast off, preparatory to the life boat making a dash through the low surf to the sandy beach.

"We'll meet you there," said Ned and Harry.

They were eager and anxious to tell their chum of their trailing of Black Beard, but there was no opportunity until they were by themselves in camp. And by taking a short cut across the sand dunes, Ned and Harry could reach camp more quickly than could Bob, who must row around the point.

Eventually, however, the chums were together, and while Bob was donning his clothes, for he had kept his bathing suit on during the trip back from the wreck, Harry announced:

"We've got something to tell you, Bob."

"And maybe Bob has something to tell us," said Ned. "Did you solve the mystery yet?" he asked.

"No, I've only just started," was the answer. "In fact I don't know just what the mystery is—or even if there is one. So let's hear your yarn."

"Oh, there's a mystery all right," declared Ned. "Black Beard isn't sneaking around in the sand dunes, like a snake, without having some reason."

"Black Beard?" questioned Bob. "You mean——"

"Nate Simpson—the missing sailor from the *Sea Hawk!*" exclaimed Harry. "We trailed him to where he looked down on the station, and we were trailing him back to his hiding place—wherever it is—when I made a chump of myself and rolled down."

"Too bad!" commented Bob when he heard the whole story. "But we ought to be able to spy out where this fellow is."

"That's what I say," declared Ned. "He can't be so very far away. But what he's doing, and how he lives is more than I can guess."

"He can live the same as the regular tramps do in the summer time," commented Bob, "by snibbying stuff from the farmers back in the country. He can sleep under a stack of hay——"

"No hay around here," broke in Ned.

"Oh, well, he could easily make a hole for himself, or build a shack of driftwood," went on Bob. "We'll have to look around."

"And what shall we do when we find him?" asked Harry. "I mean what excuse can we offer for trailing him? Suppose he fires up and wants to know why we're after him? After all, you know, it isn't our business—this mystery of the *Sea Hawk.*"

"No, not exactly," admitted Bob. "We haven't as much interest in it as we had in getting back

our club's Golden Eagle. And yet there is something queer going on, I'm sure of that!"

"Did you get any hint of it at the wreck?" asked Ned. "That's what you went for; isn't it? You didn't go just for a swim."

"You're right," admitted Bob. "I went down as deep as I dared, and I had a good look in the stern. I saw the captain's cabin. There's some sort of a chest there, and——"

"Maybe it's full of gold!" interrupted Harry, eagerly.

"Maybe—and maybe—not!" commented Bob, dryly. "I was going down again when the life-boat came along—and scared me for a moment, as I told you. But I'm going to have another try. The reason I didn't let you fellows in on it is that I thought maybe you'd say it was too dangerous, and you wouldn't want me to go."

"I guess we wouldn't if we'd have known about it," stated Ned.

"But I felt I just had to go," went on Bob, "so I got up early, appropriated the little dory and rowed out. I can make better speed next time, for I know just how the wreck lies on the rock."

"Don't take too many risks," advised Harry.

"I'll be careful," promised Bob. "And now what do you say to a hike back into the country to sort of size things up? We need some fresh eggs, anyhow, and we can buy them of some farmer."

"And maybe we'll find Black Beard's hiding place," suggested Harry.

"Maybe," admitted Bob with a smile.

It was nearly noon when they had gathered together after the visit to the wreck, and following the meal they sat about in lazy comfort for a while, discussing the many events that had crowded into the short time that had elapsed since coming to Beacon Beach.

"Well, let's go," suggested Bob, after a while, and, having put their camp in order, making sure there was no danger of fire when they were gone, they started back inland.

Beacon Beach was a rather lonely part of the coast, and no large cities were near by, a fact that had influenced the boys to pick that place for their camp. Inland farming, such as it was, formed the principal industry, while on the coast fishing gave the inhabitants a satisfactory living—that is it must be judged to have been satisfactory, for the men kept at it year after year, grandfather, father and son—generation after generation.

If the boys had any hope of locating the hiding place of the mysterious black-bearded sailor, they were doomed to disappointment, for they saw no trace of him.

They tramped along the pleasant country roads, fully enjoying themselves, and not allowing the mys-

tery of Beacon Beach to overshadow them. They were happy-go-lucky youths bent on a holiday.

They found a place where fresh eggs were for sale, according to a sign on the farm fence, and going in were met by a pleasant woman, who, probably lonely, asked them a great many questions.

When she found out they were campers she insisted on giving them some molasses cookies and milk, not a half bad combination for hungry lads, if you ask me. And I've tried it myself so I know what I'm talking about.

They reached camp again just in time for supper, and made a jolly meal of it. Then, tired with their tramp, they sat in front of the tent, talking and recalling past days of fun, while the calm evening settled down.

With the first shades of night the beacon, tended by Amos Wendy, began flashing out its warning—a bright light each second. The lads were idly watching it, and Bob was about to comment on it when, suddenly, like a firefly caught by some night-flitting bat, the light went dark—the flashes ceased abruptly.

"Light's out again!" cried Ned. "Something's wrong!"

"Let's go down there!" proposed Bob.

"Sure!" echoed Harry.

The three started off on the run.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DIVER

QUIET and calm was the evening, and the state of the weather was reflected in the sea, which lapped gently on the sands of Beacon Beach. On that part of the shore where there were rocks the ocean made a slightly louder sound, because of the water being broken up by the jagged stones. But there was only a gentle hissing noise as the small amount of surf washed up sand and small pebbles, and washed them back again.

"No storm to-night," observed Ned as he trotted along with his two chums. "It's as quiet as a graveyard."

"Sure it is," assented Bob. "But what difference does it make? Not that I'm glad we aren't going to get washed out and blown away, but what's the odds—I mean why speak of the calm weather?"

"Because of—that," and Ned pointed to the lighthouse, still dark as regards the flashing beacon, though, as the lads approached they could see lamps gleaming in the living quarters.

"Well, what of that?" asked Harry, who, like

Bob, did not seem to have grasped the significance of Ned's remark. "The light's out—that's plain, but I guess they're working to get it going again."

"Yes, they are," agreed Bob. "I can see some one with a lantern, or a flashlight, moving about in the lantern chamber."

He pointed, and clearly outlined on the big panes of glass which formed the protection to the lens and apparatus of the revolving light, could be observed the figure of a man—Amos Wendy, without doubt.

"What I mean is," went on Ned, "that there isn't any storm now to cause a wreck, so why should any one put the light out to tease a ship on Shark Rock?"

"Put the light out!" cried Bob. "Do you really think some one is doing that on purpose?"

"Sure I do—don't you?" demanded Ned. "Isn't that how the *Sea Hawk* was wrecked?"

"Not at all!" promptly came from Bob. "She broke her stearing gear and got caught in a blow. It's true the light went out at a critical moment, but that didn't have anything to do with the wreck."

"Didn't it?" asked Ned in a tone that clearly showed he was unconvinced by his chum's argument. "I think it did! Anyhow the light's out again, and there isn't any storm, so there isn't likely to be any wrecks."

"Which is a good thing," added Harry. "But I wonder what's wrong with the light?"

"We'll soon see—if he'll let us in," spoke Bob. "Hello," he added in a lower voice. "Some one else besides us is in a hurry to get to the tower."

He reached out his hands and caught hold of his two chums—one on either side of him—holding them back in their jogging trot of a run which they had kept up since leaving camp. Then, when Ned and Harry had been brought to a halt, Bob silently pointed to a lone figure slipping along through the darkness near the edge of the surf. This figure was headed toward the lighthouse.

"Who is it?" whispered Harry.

"Is it that loony sailor—Black Beard?" Ned wanted to know.

Bob did not answer for a minute and then, so suddenly that it startled the boys, the gleam of the revolving beacon flashed out again, sending the long finger-like shaft of brilliant light, now over the calm sea and, again, over the shore.

So intense was the beam, that, though it was so focused, by means of the special revolving lens to send a finger straight out, and at a right angle to the vertical axis of the tower, that enough glow was diffused to reveal the figure running along the edge of the surf.

"Abel Short!" exclaimed Ned, involuntarily rais-

ing his voice above the low tones that the lads had been using.

"Not so loud," cautioned Bob.

But it was too late. The life saver had heard, and, turning to the boys, he exclaimed:

"Well, I'm glad that light's going again! I was just running over to see if I could help old Amos. He'll be likely to lose his job—the light going out twice in less than a week. But it seems to be all right now."

He turned to look up at the beacon. Yes, it was glowing properly and sending out the warning beam.

"We saw it grow dim when we were sitting out in front of our tent just now," explained Harry, "so we ran down to see what the trouble was."

"But it seems to be over now," added Bob.

"I'm glad of it!" exclaimed Abel. "Amos is a good friend of mine, even if he did beat me out getting that lighthouse job, and, if I do say it myself, I'm better fitted for it than he is, being younger and knowing more about the sea. But that's all right—I wouldn't want to see him lose it on account of not keeping up the light. I was afraid maybe something had happened to him, so I ran over. I'm on patrol duty to-night," he concluded, "and my beat's down past the lighthouse."

I might explain that in addition to the lookout in the tower of the life saving stations, a beach

patrol is maintained. Two men, from each station, walk down the beach, each one away from his headquarters, his beat covering a distance half way between his station and the next one. He is supposed to meet the man from the other station, and the two exchange greetings and then patrol back. In some cases the men exchange metal disks, or tokens, these serving to show that they have met, and insuring to their respective captains that they have performed their duty.

In cases where the stations are too far apart for two men to cover the distance, there are certain fixed posts which the men patrol, and to check them up on this various forms of "watchmen clocks" are used. These coast patrol men watch out for signs of a wreck that might escape the eyes of the man in the tower.

Also these beach patrol guards are equipped with flaring signal lights, something like the red fire used at Fourth of July. If they sight a wreck, see signals of distress, or hear them, they burn their flare, to let those on the craft endangered know their plight has been noticed, and that help is on the way.

Having done this the coast guard communicates with his home station, either by hastening back there, or by telephoning in, wire communication being made at certain points back on the beach.

So when Abel Short spoke of patroling his beat

along the shore, Bob and his chums knew what was meant.

"Well," went on the coast guard as he stood for a moment watching the flashing light, "it seems to be all right, and I reckon Amos can take care of himself."

"Take care of himself—what do you mean?" asked Bob quickly. "Do you think he's in any danger?"

Abel was so long in replying that the young detective began to think his question had not been heard. He was about to repeat it when the life guard exclaimed:

"Well, there's been strange doings down here, and there's prowlers about that I don't like."

"Prowlers!" exclaimed Ned and Harry.

"Yes, that missing sailor—the one with the black beard. He's loose somewhere in the sand dunes and I don't like it!" Mr. Short was very emphatic.

"You speak of him as though he was a wild beast," remarked Bob.

"Well, he looks like one!" was the unexpected reply, "with his white face, staring eyes and black, bushy beard."

"Then you've seen him!" cried Bob. "Where was it? We've been looking for him! Where is he?"

"How should I know?" asked Abel.

"But you said you'd seen him!" insisted Harry.

"No, I didn't!"

"How'd you know about his looks, then?"

"Didn't you boys say he had a very white face and a black beard—the night you picked him up?"

"Yes, we did," spoke Bob slowly, "but we didn't say anything about his staring eyes—because he didn't have his eyes open when we picked him up."

Silence followed this remark, but Abel managed to scramble out of what Ned and Harry thought would prove a trap by saying:

"Oh, well, anybody that's gone through what he's gone through—hiding out as he is and living like a wild beast—naturally he'd have staring eyes. I just happened to say that."

"Oh," was all Bob remarked, but there was much meaning in the simple interjection, and then the life saver went on:

"And as long as there's nothing wrong up at the lighthouse—I mean nothing wrong that hasn't been fixed—I'll keep on my patrol. G'night, boys!"

"Good night," they answered in a chorus.

They remained for a few moments where they had come to a halt, and as the figure of Abel grew smaller and smaller in the dim darkness of early evening, Bob said, in a low voice:

"If he hadn't been going toward the lighthouse I would have thought something very queer was afoot."

"What do you mean?" asked Harry.

"He means that if he'd seen Mr. Short running *away* from the lighthouse he'd suspect him of having tampered with the light—don't you, Bob?" asked Ned.

"That's it—yes. But with him going *toward* the place, there can't be any connection."

"Unless," spoke Ned, and then, having started a sentence he seemed to think better of it and lapsed into silence.

"What do you mean?" asked Bob. "Unless—what?"

"Well, I may as well say it as think it, I reckon. I mean that little grizzled chap could have been at the lighthouse, have worked some monkey business, have run *away* and then, to make it look innocent, he could have turned around and run *toward* it; couldn't he?"

"Yes, he could," admitted Bob, after thinking it over. "But I don't believe he's deep enough to plot like that."

"Nor I," said Harry. "Of course, he's on the outs with old Wendy over the lighthouse job, but I don't believe—him being in the life saving service as he is—I don't believe he'd monkey with a lighthouse, Bob; do you?"

"No, I don't!" was the emphatic answer. "But there's one queer thing about this."

"What?" asked his two chums.

"What Abel Short said about the queer sailor—Nate Simpson—Black Beard. If he hasn't seen him how can he describe his looks so well?"

"That's so!" cried Ned. "And he does look just that way, doesn't he, Harry? White face—staring eyes and all that. Mr. Short has seen him, all right."

"I think so," commented Bob. "And another thing. He's afraid of him, too—I mean Short is afraid of Black Beard."

"Seems so," admitted Harry. "He's afraid Black Beard might have attacked the light keeper, I reckon."

"That's what I was going to say," commented Bob. "In spite of the fact that Mr. Short is jealous of old Wendy, I don't believe the life saver would want anything to happen the light keeper. And Black Beard looks enough like a pirate to do almost anything."

"What do you reckon his game is—hiding out as he is, Bob?" inquired Ned.

"Give it up," was the frank answer. "I've tried to puzzle it out, but I've given it up."

"You mean for good—you've given it up for good?" exclaimed Harry. "I thought you liked a good detective case to work on, Bob. And this sure is a case, all right!"

"Oh, no, I haven't given it up for good—I've just got up against a stone wall, so to speak. There are

so many ends to it all. But I'm still working on it —if you can call it working."

The boys were about to turn back, having observed that the light was flashing properly, when Ned observed:

"Now that we're here we might as well keep on and see what has happened. It's just barely possible, Bob, that Black Beard has been at the light."

"I don't believe so, but we'll go ask, if you like."

They found Amos Wendy somewhat excited by the going out of his light, but he gave a plausible explanation.

"It was just some dirt got in the mixing valve where the compressed air and the kerosene mix," he explained. "There wasn't any gas being fed to the burner and, naturally, the light went out."

"Did the alarm bell ring?" Bob wanted to know. "Is the thermostat working all right?"

"Oh, yes," replied the keeper. "The bell went off as soon as the light cooled down."

"But we'd have known the light was out even without the bell," put in Mrs. Wendy. "I was sitting here reading, and I missed the flashes— I can see them through my window. I called Amos at once, and he cleaned the valve."

"Then everything's all right; is it?" asked Bob.

"Yes, thank you, boys."

"And you haven't seen any intruders around here?" went on Ned.

"Intruders?" questioned Mr. Wendy.

"Do you mean—tramps?" asked the old lady.

"Well—yes—tramps," admitted Ned.

"Oh, no, they don't ever bother us!" laughed the light keeper. "We're too far away from the country roads. That's where the tramps like to hang around—farm roads, where they can find a hay stack to sleep under, or a chicken roost where they can take a hen and cook it in a tomato can over a fire. I've seen 'em—I lived back in the country 'fore I got this job. I know tramps. But we haven't seen any around here—have we, mother?"

"No," she answered. "They don't bother us. Though I'm not saying but what I'd give a tramp something to eat if he asked for it. It's terrible to be hungry; isn't it, boys?" and she smiled at them.

"It sure is!" sighed Harry.

"Do you get enough to eat, up at your camp?" went on the dear old lady. "Seems to me three boys, cooking for themselves, can't have very good meals."

"Oh, we get along fine!" insisted Bob.

"Well, if you wouldn't mind some doughnuts—and some milk," she offered, a bit timidly.

"I never turn down an offer like that!" chuckled Harry. "Bring on the doughnuts—I'm not afraid."

Mrs. Wendy laughed and set out a generous plate, together with a pitcher of milk, and the boys —well, they had a feast as you can well imagine. They remained at the lighthouse some little time longer, for the keeper and his wife were jovial, hospitable souls, and were glad of company in their rather lonely station.

The star-lit night was calm and peaceful as the lads wended their way back to their tent on the pine-clad hill above the sea. A moon was rising, reflecting in shimmering silver on the waves gently breaking on the sandy beach.

"Fine night," observed Bob, as he prepared to "turn in."

"Great," added Ned. But I wouldn't stay up to keep it company for two nights like this. I'm going to hit the hay!"

"I'm with you for pounding my ear," added Harry.

"Well, I'll look around outside, to make sure everything's all right, and then I'll join you," went on Bob.

Ned and Harry, as they undressed, heard their chum shuffling about in the dry and shifting sand that surrounded the tent. Bob paused now and then, to take observations his chums guessed, but soon came inside.

"All serene?" asked Ned, from amid the comfortable folds of his bedclothes.

"All quiet along the Potomac to-night," quoted Bob, with assumed solemnity.

"Give my regards to the moon, old top," sleepily murmured Harry.

"Ta-ta," responded Bob and soon, he too, was on his cot.

Though Ned and Harry slept soundly that night, Bob awoke several times. More than once he raised himself in bed and listened intently.

"I don't know whether I'm dreaming, or whether I'm hearing things," he said to himself. "But it seems to me somebody's walking around our tent. If I was out west I'd say it was a coyote. But here it might be a dog. Guess I'll take a look."

However a cautious inspection showed nothing and he returned to his warm nest in the bedclothes. Thereafter he slept soundly until morning.

It was after breakfast when the lads had strolled down to the beach, having no special object in view, that they made a discovery.

"Look at the wreck!" cried Ned. He pointed to what remained of the *Sea Hawk*. Two boats were clustered near it, and in the clear light of the morning a curious object, or creature, was observed on one of the craft.

"It's the diver!" cried Harry.

"Sure enough, it is!" agreed Bob. "The diver's going down to see what can be gotten out of the wreck!"

CHAPTER XVIII

BOB'S WIRELESS

WHEN one is on a vacation, whether stopping at a hotel where the rates are a hundred dollars a week, or roughing it in a simple camp, it seems to be a rule that any little event out of the ordinary is welcomed to fill in the long days, when there is no regular work to do. Things that, in the ordinary course of events, would attract no attention, are magnified into happenings of great moment.

An Italian organ grinder with a monkey will gather such a crowd in front of a fashionable summer resort hotel that you would think the Prince of Wales had arrived. While in camp, but let a rumor spread that some one has caught a big fish, or that so-and-so is having trouble with the motor of his boat, and a like crowd collects.

So it would have taken much less than the appearance of a diver at the wreck to have excited Bob and his chums.

"Say, let's go out and watch him!" cried Harry.

"I've always wanted to see a diver close by," added Ned. "Come on, Bob!"

"Sure we'll go out—the sea's calm enough for even the little dory—but we'll go in the bigger boat."

From a day of comparative idleness the boys saw before them several hours of interest, and they lost little time in hastening back around the point, into the sheltered bay where Jerry Tonk kept moored the boats he had for hire, and where the lads had made fast their own particular craft.

They made the best time possible out to the wreck of the *Sea Hawk,* for they wanted to take in all the details of the diver, in his strange attire of rubber, copper and glass, going down to the bottom of the ocean.

"It isn't very deep—down to the wreck," stated Bob.

"Well, you ought to know—you were down there," said Harry.

"But of course I couldn't stay down long enough to see much," went on Bob. "And as for getting anything up——"

"They wouldn't let you, I guess!" broke in Ned. "I mean Captain Blackford and Joe Norton. They're out there now with the diver," he added, for they were close enough, by this time, to observe faces on the two boats that were stationed on either side of the broken schooner at Shark Rock.

"No, I guess they wouldn't," agreed Bob. "There was a chest in the captain's cabin—I'd like to get

a sight into that—the chest I mean. I reckon that's what the diver is after."

"Guess so," echoed Ned.

Had it not been that something was wrong with the diver's helmet of copper and glass the boys would not have witnessed his descent.

For he had on the lower garment of canvas and rubber, with the big lead-weighted shoes, weighing thirty pounds each, when the boys put out in their boat.

But when the diver's helper had been about to screw on the helmet, and put the front glass in place (always the last thing to be done) a slight defect was observed in the collar.

"That's got to be fixed!" declared the diver. "I'm taking no chances, even if this isn't a deep job."

Hence the delay, which gave our lads a chance to pull alongside the boat on which the air pump and diving apparatus were loaded.

With eager eyes Bob, Ned and Harry looked at the preparations, which now consisted in mending the defect in the diver's collar. And the lads had time to see that Captain Blackford and Joe Norton were in the second boat, together with some other seamen.

"I guess they're the captain's partners that he spoke of," remarked Ned. "He said he'd telegraphed for them to come down to view the wreck."

"That's right," commented Harry.

No one paid any attention to the boys, and they were glad of this. For they wanted to see what went on, and they were a bit fearful lest they be ordered away.

Of course, in a manner of speaking, the *Sea Hawk* had been wrecked in the open sea, and anyone was privileged to observe her, though her owners still had certain rights in her. But it would not have been unusual, where diving operations were under way, for casual observers to be ordered away. Hence our lads were glad they were not thus treated.

Most of you are familiar with the apparatus and dress used by a diver in going down into the sea, so I will do no more than give a brief description, lest there be some who are interested, but who do not know about it.

The diver's suit is made of canvas and rubber, and he gets right into it, putting his feet and legs into the lower part, his arms into the sleeves and thrusting his hands out of the holes that terminate the sleeves. The sleeves are held tight around the diver's wrists by means of heavy rubber bands, which keep out the water. Thus the diver's fingers and thumbs are unencumbered and he can work around wrecks freely.

The upper part of the dress, or suit, consists of a copper plate which fits snugly over the man's shoulders, and this plate, rising up around the neck, terminates in a threaded copper ring. On this ring the

helmet, made of copper and glass, is screwed. There are three glass windows in positions corresponding to the diver's ears, and another one in front, so he can see directly ahead or to either side, but not behind him, of course. These glass windows are protected against breakage by cross bars of copper.

Entering the helmet from above and a little to the rear, is the air hose. Through this air is pumped down for the diver to breathe. There is also in the helmet a valve, which permits the foul, or breathed, air to escape, but which will not permit water to enter.

A diver can, if he wishes, slightly open the rubber band around one wrist, with the opposite hand, and this permits air to escape. Divers do this in case the pressure from the air pump above gets too heavy.

The slight defect in the helmet having been mended, the copper and glass headpiece was screwed on.

"Well, I guess I'm all right now," the diver said, speaking through the opening directly in front of his face—an opening not yet closed. "Work the pump till I hear how she sounds," he ordered.

Two men turned the handles that operated the air pump, and after testing the manner in which the air was coming down his hose, the diver announced himself as satisfied. The front plate of glass, with its rim of copper, was now screwed into place.

The diver was now cut off from all communication with those about him, for he was completely enclosed in his suit and helmet, and the only air he could breathe was that pumped to him through the hose.

About his waist he wore a belt with lead weights in it. This was to help him sink down, since his suit, filled with air as it was, would be so buoyant, otherwise, that he would float like a barrel on the surface. As this diver was not going very deep he did not put on as many weights as, otherwise, would have been needed.

Fastened to him was a life line, by which he could signal to his helper, and the helper, in turn, would communicate with the men working the pump—so they would send down more or less air according to the diver's needs. There was, also fastened to the queerly-attired man, a rope by which he could be pulled up from bottom, since he could not swim up as Bob had done.

Fastened over the side of the diver's boat, which had been summoned from a nearby city, was a short ladder, the lower end disappearing beneath the surface of the sea. Down this ladder the searcher now climbed, the boys watching eagerly.

No sooner was the copper helmet under water, than a train of bubbles arose, being the air exhausted from the valve. By means of this train of bubbles the diver's progress could be watched as he descended.

This job, comparatively speaking, was an easy one. There was neither great depth to contend with, nor a wreck in a dangerous place. Nor were there fierce sea monsters to fight, such as whales, sharks, or devil fish. Though, as a matter of fact, divers are in very little danger from fish. Of course a shark, or some great denizen of the deep might, by accident, sever a diver's air hose, or foul his life line. But I doubt if it would be by a deliberate attack.

Divers have told me, though, that often they are bothered by the queer curiosity of fish that hover about them when they are at work on the bottom of the sea, the finny chaps seeming to resent the strange creature's entrance into their element.

While the diver was below nothing was heard about the clank of the air pump as the men turned the handles. Occasionally the diver's helper, interpreting tugs on the line, would give the pumpers some direction, and they would increase or diminish their speed.

What was going on down below the surface the boys could not learn. They were not close enough to look directly down on the wreck, and did not want to approach closer lest they be ordered away. Captain Blackford, Joe Norton and some of the strange men seemed to be in earnest conversation, however, about what was going on. But what was said the boys could not hear—nor did they try.

At last, however, the diver must have given a signal to be hauled up, for two other men began pulling in on the rope there for that purpose. And presently the queer helmet—like the head of some fabulous monster—arose above the surface.

The diver remained on the ladder, with just his head out, while his helper unscrewed the front glass, thus enabling the man to breathe naturally, upon which the pump was stopped. Then the diver was helped up over the side of the boat, and a consultation took place between him and the others.

What was decided upon Bob and his chums could not learn, but operations were evidently postponed until another day, for the diver proceeded to divest himself of his suit, and the ropes and air hose were carefully coiled away.

"Guess he isn't going down again right away," remarked Harry.

"No," agreed Ned. "I wonder if he spotted that chest you saw, Bob."

"He couldn't very well help it. And it ought to be easy to get out. All he'd have to do would be to fasten a rope to it and they could haul it up."

"Unless it's screwed or clamped to the floor of the captain's cabin," ventured Ned. "Then he'd have to unscrew it."

"Maybe that's it," assented Bob, and, later, they learned that such was the case. Special tools were

needed to loosen the chest, and it was decided to wait another day before undertaking this.

Bob and his chums lingered about a while, and then rowed back to shore. They were followed, a little later, by the boats of the diving outfit, since only in the sheltered bay could they be safely moored against a possible storm.

If the young detective hoped to learn anything from Captain Blackford and his friends, about the mysterious wreck, the lad was disappointed. For the sailors said nothing, all of them going in to the village where the late captain of the *Sea Hawk* had secured lodgings.

"Well, there's something going on, that's sure!" declared Ned, as, later in the day, they were talking matters over.

"That's right," agreed Harry. "And here comes Bob now," he added, for Bob had told his chums he had some matters to attend to in the village, and had gone off, leaving them in camp. "Wonder what he's got?" went on Harry.

"What makes you think he has anything?" Ned wanted to know.

"He's coming back in Jerry Tonk's express wagon," replied the other. "And he wouldn't ride in that for pleasure. He'd walk, rather. So, unless he sprained his ankle, and can't walk—which isn't likely—he's bought something in town and has had Jerry bring him and it out here."

Harry's guess proved correct, for when the ramshackle old wagon halted on the sand road back of camp, Bob called to his chums:

"Come here, you fellows, and help me unload this."

"What you got?" demanded Ned.

"A wireless outfit," was Bob's answer.

"Wireless?" cried Harry. "What in the name of Tunket d'you want of a wireless outfit?"

"Oh, we want to pick up a little jazz!" laughed Bob. "I've got a good set here," and he handed out various boxes and cabinets—the knocked-down portions of a radio set, as Ned and Harry observed, while Jerry Tonk looked on interestedly, now and then flicking a fly off his bony horse.

CHAPTER XIX

STRANGE NOISES

"WELL, I guess that's all of it," remarked Bob, mentally checking over the different pieces of apparatus. "How much do I owe you, Mr. Tonk, for carting it over?"

"Oh, I dunno," was the drawling answer. "Whatever you think it's wuth, I'm satisfied."

"No, you're in the business—set your price," requested Bob, taking some money from his pocket.

"Well, then, I don't want t' overcharge you, for you're customers of mine. Yet I got t' make a livin', somehow. Would you say fifteen cents was too much?" he asked, diffidently.

"I should say it was worth half a dollar, at least," replied Bob, heartily. "You gave me a ride over, too, you know."

"Oh, shucks! That wasn't anythin'!" protested the expressman. "I always ask somebody t' ride, anyhow, so's not to be lonesome."

"Well, take this half dollar and we'll call it square," went on Bob, passing over the coin.

"It's too much!" protested Mr. Tonk, but Bob

made him keep it, and the grizzled old man drove off, much pleased with his bargain.

"Where'd you get that mass of junk?" asked Ned, as he looked at the stuff piled on the ground.

"It isn't junk," protested Bob. "That's a perfectly good wireless set. I was passing a second hand store in the village when I saw it on a table out in front, marked for sale at a very low price. I went in and asked about it. Seems some fellow back country bought it but never could get it to work. He monkeyed with it and tinkered with it until, if it ever intended to work, it got discouraged after he played with it, and then it went on the blink.

"The fellow sold it cheap, and I bought it nearly as cheap," went on Bob. "I thought, as long as we're going to be here for some time yet, we might have some fun with it."

"If you can get it to work," spoke Harry, doubtfully.

"Oh, I'll make it work all right," Bob declared. "All the parts are here—four good tubes, dry batteries, loop aerial and everything. It's got every thing from a variable condenser to the latest thing in grid leaks, and if I can't get it going so it talks to us like a Dutch uncle I'm no good—that's all."

"It's good to see a young man so full of hope," commented Ned, with a look at Harry and a wink.

"Well, if you'd get full of soap maybe you'd

feel better!" shot back Bob. "Just wait—I'll show you. I'll be bringing in San Francisco before night."

"Tell me when you pick up Cuba," requested Harry with a grin.

"You'll be begging me to let you work this before many hours," declared Bob. "Now chase yourselves. I'm going to work."

"And I'm going to swim," said Ned. "Come on, Harry."

"I'm with you."

"Wait a minute, fellows," called Bob to them after he had carried into the tent some parts of the dismantled wireless outfit.

"What's the matter—you coming?" asked Ned.

"No, but I was going to say, if I were you, I wouldn't go out to the wreck."

"Why not?" Harry wanted to know.

"Because, now that they've started a diver working on her, they might not like any one else snooping around. No use having them bawl you out for lunkheads!"

"You're right!" assented Ned.

"We weren't going out there, anyhow," stated Harry.

"All right," came from Bob. "When you come back I'll have this dingus working."

"Wish you luck!" called back Ned, as he and his chum, having donned their bathing suits, went

down to the life saving beach, for a dip in the surf. The sea was rougher than it had been, but the weather was still fine.

"Ought not to be much static to-day," observed Bob as he noted the clear, blue sky. "I ought to be able to tune in on almost any old station."

Assembling the dismantled apparatus was, however, more of a task than he had imagined, with all he knew about electricity and radio matters. The stuff was all there, but it needed a special trick in wiring the circuit, Bob decided. For when he had it put together in a manner which ought to have caused it to work, all he heard, when he put on the ear 'phones, was a clicking and humming.

"Guess Old Man Static is on the job, after all," commented Bob. "But I'll tune him out. Let's see now, if I wire that primary up the other way, and shift the secondary——"

He went on talking radio jargon to himself, and was so busy that he was unaware of the passage of time. He was startled by hearing Ned and Harry return, and looked at them almost uncomprehendingly as they entered the tent and watched him.

"What about grub?" demanded Ned.

"It's your turn to-night, Bob," added Harry.

"Whew! Is it supper time already?" asked Bob, looking at his watch. "I'd no idea it was so late. I've been working on this wireless. It's more of

a sticker than I thought. I haven't done a thing toward grub. Sorry—I'll jump right at it, and——"

"No, never mind," said Ned, good-naturedly. "I'll take it off your hands. Keep on with the puzzle. If you can get it to work we'll enjoy it as much as you."

"Thanks," murmured Bob. "I think I see where the trouble is. There's a loose connection here. Once I get that fixed I'll bring in WJZ in jig style!"

However, there was more than a loose connection which was wrong, and it was not until after Bob had eaten a hasty supper, which Ned and Harry got, that he was able to cry joyfully, after an hour more of experimenting:

"Hurray! Here she is! Got New York fine!"

He had the 'phones on his ears, as he twirled the various dials, intending to plug in the loud speaker as soon as he had the circuit clear.

"Let's hear it!" suggested Harry.

Bob, as he called it, "fiddled around" a little longer with the dials, intent on getting the tones as loud and clear as possible. Then, when he was satisfied, he plugged in the loud speaker and the tent was at once flooded with wonderful music, coming from some hotel in New York.

"Say, that's swell!" commented Harry.

"Pretty nifty, I'll say," agreed Ned. "Got to hand it to you, little 'ole dekertiff,' to bring out the jazz baby!"

"Well, I told you I'd do it!" declared Bob, with justifiable pride. "I knew that was a good set as soon as I saw it. Hadn't been given decent treatment, that's all. Now what else will you have?"

"Oh, for cats' sake, let it alone!" begged Harry, as he saw Bob about to change the dials. "You're like all the wireless bugs—as soon as you get something good you start monkeying with it trying to make it better and you spill the beans. Let it alone!"

"All right," agreed Bob, good-naturedly. "I was going to try for San Francisco, that's all. But it's a bit early for them."

He and his chums listened to the New York concert, and then tuned in on another station, finally bringing in Pittsburgh, where some one was telling a bedtime story.

"Can it!" cried Ned, as he caught the words.

"No, let it stay," begged Harry. "My kid brother likes that stuff, and it isn't half bad."

So Bob let it remain until the finish.

That was the beginning of some wonderful evening music for the boys, and they were glad they had the wireless, since there was little in the way of amusement after dark at Beacon Beach. Other campers came to hear the concerts, as did the fishermen and members of the life saving station.

Neither Captain Blackford nor any of his shipmates, however, showed up at the tent amid the

pines, to listen to the music. They could not have been busy about the wreck, either, for, from some unknown reason, the diving operations were not resumed for nearly a week after the first descent.

During this time the captain was seen occasionally in the village. But no further glimpse was had of Black Beard.

"Guess he came to his senses and cleared out," was Ned's opinion, and the others agreed with this.

The three boys were thoroughly enjoying their life in camp, though if any one had asked Bob, point blank, he would have admitted that he was a trifle put out that he could not solve the mystery.

"It just seems to have petered out," he said to his chums.

The lighthouse seemed to be operating properly, no further interruptions to the flashing beam happening. The weather remained calm, and the remains of the *Sea Hawk* were still impaled on the jagged teeth of Shark Rock.

That the diving operations were not ended was evidenced by the fact that the two boats, one with its air pump and other apparatus, were still moored in the bay.

"They're just waiting for something," decided Bob.

Meanwhile, he and his chums very much enjoyed the wireless. True to his prediction Bob brought

in San Francisco, no small feat, though it was not very powerful, because of the long distance.

To get these far away stations he had to remain up until the late hours of the night, in fact, sometimes, until the early hours of the morning. And on one occasion, when, for some reason, Ned and Harry could not sleep, they sat up with him, listening to far-off music.

Suddenly, while they were listening to Schenectady, there came an interruption to the melody that was being played. There was a queer sound of spluttering and hissing in the loud speaker.

"What's that?" cried Harry.

"Static," declared Ned.

"No, it isn't static," said Bob, as he bent over the instrument. "Sounds more like some very powerful station, close by, sending out code messages. I'll see if I can find out what it is."

He cut out the loud speaker, and put the 'phones on his ears. While waiting for his chum's report on the trouble, Ned strolled to the front of the tent and stepped outside. He came back a moment later to exclaim:

"Lighthouse is dark again!"

CHAPTER XX

A DISCOVERY

Bob and his chums, by this time, had become so accustomed to trouble at the lighthouse that they did not attach to it the significance which they did at first. They knew the complicated nature of the beacon apparatus, and, doubtless, reasoned that Amos Wendy would get it working again, sooner or later. Anyhow there was no storm nor the sign of one, the sea being very calm.

"Want to go down, Bob, and see if you can help him with his thermostat?" called Ned to Bob, who was still fussing away over the radio.

"What's that?" asked the young detective, for, with the head 'phones on it was difficult to hear outside conversation.

"I say the light's gone out again—want to go down and see if you can help the old man?"

"No, I guess not now," Bob replied, as he removed the head piece. "It's late, and he seems to know how to get it going again. I'd like to find out who's sending out those powerful signals, though," he went on with a puzzled look at the

dial board in front of him. "I can't seem to cut him out, whoever it is."

"What is it—commercial?" asked Harry, referring to the dot and dash sending of wireless signals to and from ships at sea, which keep the vessels in touch with the companies owning them.

"It's dot and dash all right," replied Bob, "but I can't make head or tail of it. They're sending a queer lot of words that don't seem to mean anything —words like ixor, backex, quentdor, simpax and so on."

"Code," suggested Ned.

"Sure it's code—I know that," came from Bob. "And I'm not going to turn into a cross-word puzzler and try to decode it. What I'm trying to do is to find out where the blooming stuff is coming from."

"Out of the air," suggested Harry. "And that's where I'm going, very soon—out of the air and into my bed."

"Of course it's out of the air!" conceded Bob. "Think I'm an amateur? But I'd like to know what station it is—I mean in what direction it's located. In that way I might turn my loop aerial in the other direction and tune him out."

"Try turning the loop in all directions, and when you find the signals are faintest, that's an indication he isn't there," said Ned.

"Likewise, when the signals come strongest, that's a sign he's in that direction," added Harry.

"Yes," agreed Bob, speaking slowly, as though his thoughts were crowding him, "I could do that. I've been so busy, trying to identify the sender by the kind of stuff he's clicking out, that I haven't tried that. Keep still a minute now—you two."

Ned and Harry obediently remained quiet, while Bob again put on the 'phones and listened, at the same time twirling his loop aerial about and making changes in his primary and secondary dials.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, when he had reached a certain point. "It's getting more powerful than ever, and stranger. I never heard such an array of signals!"

"Aren't they the regular dot and dash?" asked Ned.

"No—not now. They've changed. It isn't any Morse or continental system this fellow's using. It's very strange."

"Say, I have it!" suddenly cried Harry.

"What?" asked his two chums.

"They're signaling from Mars—that's what it is! Sure! Mars, you know, is nearer the earth now than it will be for another hundred and twenty years. I read that the government wireless stations were going to try and pick up signals from the red planet. Lots of people think Mars is inhabited, you know, and that the people there are like us, only smarter. They probably discovered wireless before we did, and they may be trying to signal

to us. That's why the dot and dash system is different from the regular, Bob."

"Maybe," assented the other with a little laugh, which showed that he wasn't much impressed by his chum's theory. "How near is Mars now, anyhow—you say it's at the nearest point."

"Yes," went on Harry. "I think it's only about twenty-six millions of miles from us now—you can see it plain! Look!"

He pointed out of the open tent toward the southeastern sky where the mysterious red planet was ablaze in its glory.

"Only twenty-six million miles," murmured Ned.

"Oh, a few million miles doesn't make any difference to the wireless operator on Mars!" scoffed Bob. "Wait, I'll see what he says," and, mockingly, he put on the head piece again, and tuned in. Now the strange signals were so strong that Ned and Harry, from where they sat on the other side of the tent, could hear the clicking in the diaphragms of the telephone receivers.

"He sends his best wishes to you fellows, and says you're to go to bed!" Bob pretended to translate. "He's signing off."

"Has he finished?" asked Ned.

"Sure," replied Bob, and as he took the 'phones from his ears his chums noted that the instruments were silent, though the battery power in Bob's radio was still turned on.

The strange signals had ceased. Ned arose, and going to the tent flap, to fasten it for the night, looked down the beach and called out:

"Light's going again."

"Is it?" exclaimed Bob, and there was such a sudden interest in his voice that both his chums looked at him in surprise. "Let's see," he went on, and, stepping outside, he verified the fact for himself.

"Why, what's strange about it?" asked Harry. "We all know the light has been uncertain of late. I guess the machinery needs overhauling. But every time it goes out old Wendy gets it going again. But now you seem to think it strange, Bob."

"It is strange," said the young detective, and, as he made this remark he glanced at his wireless apparatus. "Very strange."

But in what manner it was strange, and what thoughts it brought to him, Bob did not say.

"I'll listen for this chap to-morrow night," he declared as he went to bed, an example followed by his chums.

The next day, inquiring at the lighthouse, the lads learned that the same trouble experienced before had put out the light.

"Oil feed became jammed," explained Mr. Wendy. "I soon had it fixed, though. But I'm going to apply for a new light."

"You mean you want to be sent to another station?" asked Bob.

"No. I mean, when the inspector comes down—as he will in a few days—I'm going to ask to have some new apparatus put in. This is old, and when it gets out of order they blame me for it."

"Did your thermostat work all right when the light went out?" asked Harry.

"No, it didn't," was the unexpected answer. "It worked, but the funny part of it is that it rang the bell while the light was still glowing. And when the light went out it stopped ringing."

"That is queer," agreed Bob. "Just what time were you able to get your light going again?" he asked the keeper.

"Well, it was about a quarter after twelve—midnight," was the answer.

Bob looked at something he had written down on a bit of paper, and Ned, happening to glance over his chum's shoulder, saw the figures—12:16—on the paper.

"And did the thermostat bell stop ringing as soon as you got the light going?" Bob wanted to know.

"Yes, or it might be a few minutes afterward. The whole machinery seems to be out of order. I'm going to make a report of it."

"Yes," agreed Bob, "I would. Anything new out at the wreck?" he asked, for from where they stood, in front of Mr. Wendy's little cottage, they could see the remains of the schooner at Shark Rock.

"Well, I heard the diver was going down again

to-day," was the reply. "Though what he expects to get I don't know. According to Captain Blackford's tell there was only ore specimens in that ship, and they're on the bottom by this time—they must have fallen out of the hold when the ship broke in two."

"I guess so," agreed Ned.

"Well, we'll take a walk, and then maybe we'll go out and watch the diver," Bob told his chums, as they left the lighthouse.

"Walk—where do you want to walk?" asked Harry, for he noticed a strange eagerness in Bob's manner.

"I want to walk back in the country," Bob answered.

"What's the idea—going to buy a cow?" and Ned imitated the drawl of a farmer—a stage farmer, be it said.

"No, but I want to make a discovery," stated Bob.

"What sort of a discovery?" inquired Ned. "Has it anything to do with the wreck, and Black Beard? It's queer we can't find where he's hiding. Are you going to look for him, Bob?"

"Not exactly, though I think he isn't far off. But this is another matter. You fellows want to come?"

"Might as well," agreed Ned. "But what's the use being so all-fired mysterious about it, Bob. Why

can't you tell us what you expect to find back in the country?"

"Well, I hardly know myself, yet, fellows. I'm thinking hard on this, but I don't seem to get anywhere. It's only a theory and may amount to nothing. If it does I'll let you in on it."

"That's a bargain!" cried Harry. "We're with you. Come on, Ned, and we'll help him make a discovery we don't know anything about."

"And he doesn't, either," chuckled Ned, "so it's fifty-fifty."

Learning, on inquiring, that the diver would not go down until afternoon, the boys started off on a trip along a back-country road. They wanted to return in time to see the man go down in the water at the wreck.

Bob appeared to have no particular objective in view as he walked along, but his chums noticed that he kept in a general southwest direction. And, every now and then, he would stop and look at what seemed to be a compass. Then he would attach 'phones to his ears and connect them with a pocket wireless set which he had made some time before. He had brought this to camp with him, but had not set it up—indeed he had forgotten about it until after getting those strange signals the night before.

"Getting Mars?" joked Ned, as Bob again stopped to listen in on his little pocket set.

There was no answer for a moment—Bob was

listening intently. Then, suddenly, he jumped up from where he was seated on a roadside rock and cried:

"I'm on the track, boys!"

"Not the railroad track, I hope!" teased Ned. "If you are I'm going to get off," and he made an elaborate jump to one side.

"Don't be silly!" snapped out Bob.

"Well, what's going on then—let us in on it!" begged Harry.

"I think we'll find out something very soon," went on Bob. "I'm on the track, I'm sure. Come on!"

He put away his apparatus and started off on a fast pace up and over a hill which they had reached. Ned and Harry, with amused looks at each other—for they well knew Bob's queer ways—followed.

Their active chum led them on at a fast pace, and reached the top of the hill ahead of them. And when he reached the brow his exultant cry rang out:

"I've found it, fellows! I've found it! Come on!"

CHAPTER XXI

ONE MYSTERY SOLVED

When Ned and Harry reached the top of the little back-country hill, which elevation Bob had climbed ahead of them, they found their scientific chum walking toward a small, red building erected in a little fenced enclosure. From the open door could be had a glimpse of shining brass and copper instruments, and on top of the building was a short mast.

It needed but a glance at this to show that it was a wireless mast, for gleaming points of steel or copper stuck out from it—a new sort of aërial, the boys judged.

"This is it, fellows, I'm sure," went on Bob, as his chums joined him.

"What is it?" inquired Ned.

"The wireless station that has been sending out those powerful signals."

"The ones we thought were from Mars?" Harry asked.

"That's all bosh about Mars!" declared Bob. "But here are where the signals came from that

broke up our concert last night. And, unless I'm mistaken, the finding of this will solve one mystery, at least."

"You mean about the wreck of the *Sea Hawk?*" Ned wanted to know.

"There isn't any mystery about the wreck of that schooner!" declared Harry. "She just piled up on Shark Rock in the storm and because her rudder broke."

"No, but there's a mystery about what was aboard, and a mystery about that queer man who keeps himself in hiding," went on Ned. "Isn't there, Bob?"

"I should say there might be. No, I didn't mean I think I am going to solve the mystery of the schooner. But I think I can put my finger on the cause of the lighthouse thermostat acting up so queer. And though it may have had no connection with the going out of the light, still there might be some cause of that involved."

"You can put your finger on it?" questioned Harry. "Do you mean—that?"

He pointed to the small red building, whence came a peculiar hum and whine.

"That's it!" declared Bob. "If I'm right, this is a very powerful wireless sending station—and a receiving one, also. And it's from here that the signals came that I could make nothing of. Let's go in and see if we can find out anything."

"If they don't fire us before we get inside the fence," murmured Ned.

"That's right—we may be ordered off," agreed Bob. "But I think it's a government station, and if we ask decently they may let us in."

'What makes you think it's a government station?" asked Harry.

"Because the signals were so powerful. None other than a government station would send out wireless on a ten thousand meter wavelength, as this one did."

"Ten thousand meters!" cried Harry. "As high as that?"

"Pretty nearly," declared Bob. "Of course, I could only guess at it. But from the way it clicked in the telephones I'd say it was that much, at least."

"Whew!" whistled Harry. "Some station!"

The lads, with the ingenuous confidence of youth, had advanced until they were now almost at the fence which divided the little red building from the surrounding field. No other houses or barns were near it—the surrounding country being a particularly lonesome spot.

Reaching the gate, which wasn't locked, Bob hesitated a moment and then said:

"Well, let's chance it! They haven't set the dog on us yet, and I don't believe they will. Come on!"

Needing but a leader, Ned and Harry followed their chum. Their feet crunched on the neat gravel

walk—a walk, with its surrounding grass plots being kept in order, as the boys guessed, by an old man, with a somewhat soldierly bearing, who appeared around the corner of the building, rake in hand. He looked keenly at the boys, but did not halt them, and, made bolder by this, they advanced to the very door, within which they could see those shining brass and copper instruments, and whence came that peculiar whining sound.

Bob and his chums found themselves looking into what they knew was a powerful, new and up-to-date wireless station. While they were wondering why such a station had been placed in this lonesome place, a voice challenged them:

"Well?"

The voice had authority in it, but was not ugly, nor was it harsh. Looking in the direction of the single interrogation, the boys saw a pleasant-faced, military-appearing man seated before a combined table and instrument board, fairly bristling with dials, switches, gages and the like.

"Oh, excuse us, but is this a wireless station?" asked Bob, his two chums virtually conceding to him the right to take the lead.

The boys would not have been at all surprised had the man replied to them with gentle sarcasm:

"Oh, no, this is a moving picture theater!"

For it was rather a foolish question, numbered well up in the thousands. Almost any lad, in these

modern days, would have recognized the place as a wireless or radio headquarters of some sort. And, as a matter of fact, Bob and his chums knew this to be the case. Yet, for the life of him, Bob could not help his rather foolish inquiry.

But the man at the instrument desk did not take advantage of the opening thus given him. Instead, with a smile, he remarked:

"That's just what it is. Won't you come in? We don't have many visitors, but they're always welcome."

As a matter of record the boys were already within the red station, but now, with this welcome ringing in their ears, they advanced farther, and, as they did so, from an inner room, emerged a man who in his shirt sleeves, had every appearance of a working electrician. And from the door he opened came a louder whining and humming sound.

"We're camping over at Beacon Beach," Bob informed the man at the desk. "We were just hiking back here in the country when we saw this station. We've got a wireless set in our tent and we picked up your signals last night."

"You did?" exclaimed the man in his shirt sleeves. "You must have a pretty good set to do that." There was admiration in his voice—professional admiration.

"We have!" declared Harry.

"And Bob knows how to work it, too," added Ned.

"Are you a wireless operator?" asked the man at the desk.

"Only an amateur," answered Bob, diffidently.

"We're all amateurs in this game," was the encouraging answer. "It's too new for anybody to claim he's a professional. I've been in it ever since it came out, but I learn new things every day, and find out how very little I do know. So don't be ashamed of calling yourself an amateur."

"Well, I don't really know much about it," Bob went on. "But I did manage to pick up your signals last night. In fact I couldn't tune them out."

"We thought they might be from Mars," put in Ned.

The man at the desk laughed.

"We are sending out some pretty powerful ones," he admitted.

"But Bob couldn't make head or tail of them," came from Harry. "Were they in code?"

At this the man in his shirt sleeves laughed.

"That's what they were—government code—secret," he replied.

"Oh, is this a government station?" asked Bob.

"Yes," replied the man at the desk. "It's one of the new experimental stations being set up along the coast to work in connection with ships, giving their bearings by radio compass, you know."

"I've read about that," spoke Ned. "It's quite complicated."

"Not when you know how it's done," said the man at the desk. "In fact, we are getting it down so that a great deal of it is automatic."

"Do you signal to lighthouses, too?" asked Bob, and from the tone of his question his chums knew he had some peculiar object in view.

"Lighthouses, no," answered the man at the desk. "You haven't been in communication with any lighthouses, have you, Jack?" he asked the electrician.

"No, Mr. Sneed. Of course some keeper may have a wireless set, and pick up our signals, as these boys did, but I don't believe they could decode them —not that it mattered if they did, for we haven't been sending out anything that had any real meaning."

"Does that answer your question, my lad?" the man at the desk wanted to know. Sneed, evidently, was his name.

"Yes, sir, in a way," replied Bob.

"Perhaps you'd like to look over the station," went on Mr. Sneed. "You may show them about, Jack, if you aren't busy," he went on. "I have these reports on last night's experiments to send back to Washington."

"I'll show them the place," offered Jack Blake, which, the lads learned, was his name. "Come this way," he invited. "I'll take you to the generating

room first, and then I'll show you the sending and receiving apparatus."

I shall not weary you with a description of the technical part of this big wireless station. Sufficient to say that it was unique. Bob and his chums had never seen anything like it. The very latest and newest in powerful radio instruments were being used.

The station, Jack Blake informed the lads, was one of several recently set up by the radio department of the government. It was in charge of men from the navy, from which both Mr. Sneed and Mr. Blake had been detailed.

"The old man raking the paths—isn't he a soldier?" asked Ned.

"He was once—yes. Is yet, as a matter of fact," answered Mr. Blake. "Tim Nafey has fought in about every war we've ever had, I guess. He's retired now, and he came out here to end his days in peace. You should hear some of the stories he can tell."

Bob and his chums were eagerly interested in the wireless station, though of course there were many technical points they only understood in a hazy way. Bob asked many questions, but they all tended toward the kind of current that was sent out, its power and what it might do in a magnetic way.

"Could it exert a magnetic force, say at a distance of five miles?" Bob wanted to know.

"Yes, it has a certain magnetic power," admitted Mr. Blake. "It isn't designed for that, however. The magnetism is a sort of by-product, so to speak. We are trying to get rid of it, as a matter of fact. It hampers us in our signaling work."

"It makes other trouble, too," spoke Bob.

"Trouble?" questioned Mr. Blake, who had led the lads back to the main room, where Mr. Sneed had evidently completed his reports, for he was strolling about, smoking a cigarette. "Oh, you mean it puts your amateur receiving sets out of commission."

"Yes, that and something else," went on Bob, and his chums wondered what he was leading up to.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Sneed, curiously, for he had been listening.

"I mean," went on Bob, "that the magnetic current you generate is interfering with the thermostatic control of the Beacon Beach lighthouse. That's what's been causing the light to go out these last few nights. I was pretty sure that was what caused the thermostat to act so queer, but I couldn't imagine where the magnetic current came from. Now I can see it comes from here."

"What makes you think so?" asked the electrician.

"Well, I can't really prove it—that is just yet," confessed Bob with a smile. "But yours is just the sort of a place that would send out the kind of signals that have been doing the damage."

"Damage?" questioned Mr. Sneed.

"Well, there hasn't really been any damage done yet," Bob had to say, "but there might have been if this was winter and the light went out in a storm."

"Yes, a lighthouse that doesn't show in a storm isn't of much use," admitted the other. "But I should like to know on what you base your theory. Are you an electrician?"

"Not exactly," Bob answered.

"He's a detective," said Ned.

"Oh, cut it out," begged his sleuth-like chum. "I'm only an amateur," he admitted. "But I've been checking up with a magnetic compass on the direction some powerful signals are coming from, and the indications are that your current is causing the interruption in the light—setting the thermostat off at the wrong time."

"By Jove!" cried Mr. Sneed. "I never thought of that! Jack, the lad may be right! We have a powerful magnetic control here. It radiates in all directions. If it's been putting the light on the blink —say, we'll have to look into this! Tell me more about it, young man!"

"I think this is going to solve one mystery," began Bob, as he prepared to relate the circumstances at the Beacon Beach tower. "This is what has happened. The other night——"

He was interrupted by the appearance, in the doorway, of another man—a man with keen, sharp

eyes, and an air of assurance about him. This man, who seemed to be hedged about with a certain silent power, looked into the room where the boys and the wireless men were, and then, with a nod toward Mr. Sneed, was about to withdraw.

"I'll come again when you haven't visitors," he said.

"That's all right—come in, Jackson!" invited Mr. Sneed. "These are some camping boys who dropped in to tell us something of their wireless troubles. They're from Beacon Beach."

"Beacon Beach?" repeated the man who had been called Jackson.

His eyes swept over the boys with a peculiar searching glance. Afterward Ned said he felt as if they had looked right through him.

"From Beacon Beach, eh?" repeated Mr. Jackson slowly.

"Where the *Sea Hawk* is wrecked," added Harry, as if to assist the man's memory.

"Oh—the *Sea Hawk?*" and the newcomer laid peculair emphasis on the words. "Yes—the *Sea Hawk*—well, I'll stop in again," he added, and with that he turned and went out.

CHAPTER XXII

BLACK BEARD'S HUT

"DON'T be in a hurry, boys. It's all right!"

Mr. Sneed said this as he detected, in Bob and his chums, a desire to hurry away, for they thought they were keeping Mr. Jackson from coming in.

"It's all right," went on the wireless man. "His business will keep—he'll come back again."

"Is he a wireless expert, too?" asked Ned.

"No, not exactly," was the answer. "He's more in the line of—but I forgot—I'm not supposed to discuss his business," and Mr. Sneed quickly switched off on the topic before under discussion by saying: "Tell me all about this lighthouse trouble."

If Bob had any suspicions in connection with the strange Mr. Jackson, who bobbed in and bobbed out again, in that quick way, the young detective did not disclose them to his chums.

"I'll tell you all I know about the light, and what's happened there," he said. "Old Mr. Wendy is at his wits' end, and he's been waiting for the government inspector to come down and straighten him out."

"Maybe you could call an inspector from Washington by wireless," suggested Ned. "That would be quicker than writing, and maybe save a lot of red tape."

"There's plenty of red tape in Washington—I'll say that," laughed Mr. Sneed. "Our department, being newer, isn't bound up in it quite as tightly as the others. But let's get at the bottom of this."

Thereupon Bob and his chums, for occasionally he referred a question to Ned or Harry, related what they knew of the strange going out of the light, and the failure of the thermostat to operate on the night of the storm and later.

"I got to thinking a magnetic pull could make the thermostat connection and ring the bell, when it oughtn't to ring," said Bob.

"But could a magnetic current put the light out?" asked Harry. "That's the queerest part of it—how the light goes out."

"Wait a minute," suggested Mr. Blake. "I don't know much about lighthouses, but isn't there some arrangement, boys, by which, if the light should overheat the supply of oil gas would be cut off? It would seem there ought to be some such arrangement as that, worked on the thermostat idea. Say, for instance, the needle mixing valve got opened too far by accident. That would feed in too much gas. The lamp would overheat and might crack the lens. If this happened while the keeper was asleep—as it

would be just as likely to do—wouldn't it be wise to have some arrangement to shut off the gas entirely?"

"That would put the light out," said Ned.

"Of course it would," admitted Mr. Blake. "And that's what would be needed as a measure of safety. Then, when the light was out, the other thermostat, cooling so that contact would be made and the circuit opened, would ring the bell."

"That's it!" cried Bob. "That's it. I didn't think of that. There are two thermostats on the light. I remember them, but I thought the second one was only for emergency use, in case the first didn't work. I never even bothered to ask Mr. Wendy about it.

"But I see, now. That other thermostat is to close off the gas supply at the source, in case the light overheats. The mystery is explained now."

"I don't see how," spoke Harry. "Even if some magnetic current from this wireless station reached the lighthouse, how does it put out the light?"

The magnetic current exerts a pull on the magnet in the second thermostat, just as would be done in case the light overheated and expanded the pieces of metal so they touched," explained Mr. Blake. "That's easy to understand. And that's what has happened. I can well believe that now. Our magnetic current has been playing havoc with the old man's light," he said to his superior.

"Well, that's too bad. But I think we can obvi-

ate that. We can cut down our magnetic power—really it isn't vital to our radio work, or we can insulate it in some way. I must give my attention to this."

"Has your magnetic power been going out all the while?" asked Harry. "If it has, why doesn't it put the light out every night, instead of only once in a while?"

That seemed a puzzler for a moment until Mr. Blake, with a smile, answered:

"No, we don't generate that powerful magnetic current every night. In fact, we very seldom do—it's only when we're experimenting in a peculiar way with radio signals that we use it. Now can you tell us just when the light has gone out?"

Bob and his chums consulted together. It chanced that Bob, being a methodical sort of chap, as most detectives are, had made notes of the nights, and the hours, when the light went out. Checking these figures against the recollections of Ned and Harry, he found them correct and gave them to Mr. Sneed.

In turn the wireless men went over their records and it was found, in every case, that when the light had gone out, so unexpectedly and strangely, there had been generated the powerful magnetic current.

"Then the mystery is solved!" cried Harry.

"Part of it is," commented Bob.

"What, is there more of a mystery at Beacon Beach?" asked Mr. Sneed with a smile.

"Oh, it's only about the wreck of the *Sea Hawk,*" said Bob. "One of the sailors from it is acting sort of crazy—got hit on the head, I guess, and he's appearing and vanishing in a queer way."

"Well, that doesn't concern us," remarked Mr. Blake. "We might come in for a call-down on the part of the lighthouse department for interfering with beacons and endangering navigation," he went on, "because we put out this light. But as long as no harm has been done, so far—and I understand the *Sea Hawk* wasn't wrecked because the light went out the night of the storm—why, I think all will be well as soon as we correct our current."

"See to it right away, Blake," ordered Mr. Sneed. "And we're much obliged to you boys for telling us about it."

"Indeed we are," joined in Mr. Blake. "We might have gone on for months interfering with the light, for we seldom go to Beacon Beach and we might never have heard about it. But I'll guarantee it won't happen again."

"We'll tell Mr. Wendy that," offered Bob.

"Do. And if we see this mysterious stranger—what was it you called him—Black Beard—why, we'll see if we can find out at what hotel he's stopping," said Mr. Sneed, laughing.

"I'd like to find out where he's keeping himself,"

Bob remarked. "Though after I locate him, I don't know what I'd say to him."

"I guess Captain Blackford and his mate, Joe Norton, would like to talk to him," suggested Harry.

They were taking their leave, having thanked their new friends for the trouble taken in showing them over the wireless plant, when Mr. Sneed called:

"Oh, I say, boys, you needn't be surprised if you get a visit from my friend Mr. Jackson. He may call on you."

"Would he want to know if the lighthouse works all right, after you stop the magnetic current?" asked Ned.

"No, not exactly. He would be more likely to ask you what you know of the wreck of the *Sea Hawk*."

"Why—we don't know anything about it, really," declared Harry.

"Well, you tell Jackson what you know—I advise that," and Mr. Sneed laughed in a peculiar way.

"I wonder what he means by that?" asked Ned as the three boys trudged off down the hill toward their distant camp.

"Give it up," murmured Bob. Truth to tell, he was rather priding himself on the manner in which the mystery of the lighthouse had been solved. His

chums were not slow to congratulate him, for as they walked on, Ned exclaimed:

"Got to hand it to you, Bobby, old scout!"

"That's right!" chimed in Harry. "How'd you ever figure it out?"

"Oh, well, I got to thinking when I picked up those powerful wireless signals that there must be a sending station close by," answered Bob, modestly enough. "I knew it would very likely be a ways back in from the shore, to get a high point to send out signals to ships. I had heard about the radio compass, and read that the government was conducting experiments in it. So I just thought I'd scout around a bit and see if I could find the place. And I did."

"Walked right into it, just as if you had it on a map," said Harry. "How'd you do that?"

"Well, my pocket wireless set gave me the general direction, for I noticed that when I turned the little aerial one way I got signals stronger than when it was turned the other way. Then, too, I have a magnetic compass, and that helped."

"Easy when you know how," commented Ned, smiling.

They kept on until they came to a place where the road forked. They had come over the left fork from their camp. Now Ned proposed taking the other back.

"Maybe it's a short cut," he remarked. "And I

sure would like to get back to camp soon—I'm hungry."

"What say, Bob, shall we try it?" asked Harry.

"Well, it seems to go in the general direction of our camp," was Bob's opinion, as he looked at his compass. "It may be a short cut and, again, it may not."

"Let's take a chance, anyhow," begged Ned, and they agreed to.

The road, however, soon dwindled out into a mere foot path, and later that was almost lost in the woods and underbrush. But the lads were not daunted, particularly as Bob said they were going in the right general direction, so they kept on.

Suddenly Ned, who was in the lead, came to a halt and stepped back as he came to a turn in the seldom-used path.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob, who was behind him.

"Hush! Not so loud!" cautioned Ned. "Look! If that isn't Black Beard's hut may I never eat another piece of pie!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BLACK BOX

HARRY PIERCE, who had lingered behind in the woods to pull up a bit of sassafras root, which he was chewing, came stumbling along the half-overgrown path, unaware that his two chums had halted and were gazing fixedly at something just ahead.

"Hey! Where are you?" called Harry, for he had lost sight of his friends owing to the windings of the path and the trees lining it, which trees arched overhead and bent down on either side.

Almost as Harry asked this question he heard a rustling of the bushes over to his right, and turning in that direction he cried:

"What are you doing over there—looking for birds' nests?"

Greatly to his surprise he was answered from another point of the compass—a point directly ahead of him, and he heard Ned's voice say, somewhat sharply:

"Cut it out! What do you think you are, anyhow, a cheer leader at a football game? Not so loud!"

"What's the matter?" asked Harry in a cautious whisper as he pushed forward and joined Bob and Ned, who were standing still and peering through the bushes, into a little clearing where stood a tumble-down hut. "Oh—that's it, is it?" went on Harry, as he viewed the shack. "Who lives there, I wonder?"

"Ned seems to think it's where Black Beard has been hiding," replied Bob. "And I don't know but what he's right. It would be just the sort of place for a crazy man to have his hang-out."

"Then it must have been Black Beard I heard over in the bushes a minute ago," went on Harry.

"Where?" asked Ned eagerly.

"Over there. I thought it was you two—that's why I hollered about looking for nests. But it must have been that crazy sailor sneaking away."

"Then if he's gone we'll have a look at his shack!" decided Ned promptly, taking a step forward.

"Not so fast!" exclaimed Bob, catching his chum by the arm.

"Why not?"

"Because we aren't sure it was Black Beard that Harry heard. It may have been a dog, or a stray cow. The man may be in there, and he mightn't like our spying on him."

"Well, we could give him a message—that would be an excuse for knocking at his door—though it

doesn't look as if the shack had a door," spoke Ned.

"It hasn't," declared Harry. "But what message could you give him, Ned?"

"We could tell him his friends, Captain Blackford and Joe Norton, would like to see him. And maybe he doesn't know about the diver that's going down at the wreck. We could tell him that."

"I don't believe either would be much news to him," whispered Bob. In fact, the three lads were using the utmost caution in speaking. But their eyes were eagerly fastened on the rude shack, or hut, which had been so unexpectedly discovered there in the woods.

The building—appearing to consist of but one room—was made of slabs, boards and pieces of bark, with chunks of turf and matted grass on top for a roof. It was such a shack as boys might build, and may have originally been constructed by fisher lads who wanted to play "pirate."

As for the origin of the shack, our friends did not stop to consider this. They were intent on trying to find out whether or not Black Beard, or any one else for that matter, was inside.

But after they had stood observing it for some time, and saw no one, and heard no sound, Bob observed:

"I don't believe any one's there."

"Shall we take a chance and go look?" asked Harry.

"If he should be asleep in the corner, and bawl us out for coming we could pretend we had one of those messages for him," suggested Ned.

Bob considered this for a moment, his chums deferring to his judgment, and then he announced his decision.

"We'll go take a look," said the young detective.

As cautiously as though tracking some wild beast which might be in hiding, the lads approached the shack. The nearer they came to it the better view they had of its roughness and its almost utter lack of the ordinary comforts of a dwelling. It was a shack—nothing more.

But they might have spared themselves their elaborate precautions. For when they were close enough to the hut to look within, they saw, almost at a glance, that it was empty. I say "almost." for there was a pile of old clothes, bags and bits of carpet in one corner, which might have covered the form of a sleeping man.

But once they had thrust their heads into the opening that corresponded to a doorway, and their eyes had become accustomed to the semi-darkness, they noted that the pile of old rags was a bed—and it wasn't occupied.

"He's gone," said Bob, using his natural tones. There was no longer need for cautious whispering.

"Yes, whoever he is—he's gone," added Harry.

"Black Beard lives here—I'm sure," declared Ned.

"Somebody does—that's certain," was Bob's opinion. "He's been eating here, too, though he hasn't much in the way of dishes."

On a broken box, which served as a table, were some large clam shells that seemed to take the place of dishes. Several empty tin cans, a rusty knife and some pointed sticks, that may have served as forks, were also on the box.

"He's living here like a regular Robinson Crusoe," exclaimed Harry.

"A bit, yes," agreed Bob. "I wonder what his game is?"

The other boys wondered, also, and made various suggestions and gave guesses.

"What do you think, Bob?" asked Ned, at length.

"Well, I think this man—Black Beard—or whoever he is, has some reason for keeping out of the way of his shipmates. I don't believe he wants to keep out of our way, but he doesn't want to meet those with whom he was associated while on the *Sea Hawk*."

"Then why doesn't he light out—vamoose—get away from here?" demanded Ned. "Why doesn't he go away from where Captain Blackford and Joe Norton are staying? Why, if Black Beard is afraid, or doesn't want to run up against his shipmates,

does he hang around Beacon Beach, I ask you that, Bob?"

"And I've got to say I don't know," was the frank answer. "Of course this man—Nate Simpson I suppose his name is—may be out of his head—crazy from a blow received when the vessel struck, or something like that—and so not be responsible for what he does. That would account for his queer way of hiding."

"Supposing he isn't crazy—what then?" asked Harry.

"Well, then, we've got to build up some new theories," stated Bob. "It may be that there is something in the wreck this man hopes to get when Captain Blackford and the others have given up and gone away. That's why he's staying on here."

"That sounds reasonable," admitted Ned. "But what could it be that he wants to get out of the wreck? Yellow boys—gold, do you think?"

"I don't stock much on the gold theory," stated Bob, "though that looks like a chest which would hold treasure—I mean the one down in the captain's cabin. The reason I don't hold much to the gold theory is that South America isn't noted for gold deposits. But then it may be the *Sea Hawk* didn't come from South America."

"They said she did," exclaimed Ned.

"I know they said so—but they may have done that just to throw off suspicion."

"That's so," admitted Ned. "I believe you're right, Bob! Black Beard is hanging around here, hoping those two will go, so he can search the wreck."

"How can he make a search if Captain Blackford goes away and takes the diver with him—which he's likely to do?" asked Harry.

"Couldn't Black Beard dive down, and get in the wreck, same as Bob did?" demanded Ned.

"I didn't exactly go in," stated Bob.

"No, but you could have if you wanted to. And Black Beard, being a sailor, may be a better diver and swimmer than you, Bob."

"Yes, that's very likely."

"Say, maybe he was a pearl diver!" excitedly cried Ned. "Say, that's it, I'm sure. It's pearls on board the *Sea Hawk!* Pearls are worth a lot of money! What say?"

"Never heard of any pearl fisheries off South America," and Bob shook his head. "You've got another guess."

The boys were wandering about the hut. No other clews to the dweller of it came to their eyes than those they had already seen. It was a dreary, lonesome place, though not many miles from the fishing village of Beacon Beach.

Suddenly Harry uttered an exclamation.

"What's the matter—do you see him coming?" demanded Ned.

"No, but I've just thought of something," was the answer. "You said, Ned, that maybe Black Beard was waiting until Blackford and Norton got out of the way so he could have a chance to get some treasure off the wreck; didn't you?"

"Yes, it may be that."

"Well, couldn't it be that Black Beard has *already* got some treasure off the wreck, and is hiding out here so they won't take it away from him? How about that?"

Neither Bob nor Ned answered for a moment but there was a strange, shining light in the eyes of the young detective.

"Do you know, Harry, I believe you've struck it!" he exclaimed. "I never thought of that, but it's very reasonable. Just think of it. These men on the *Sea Hawk* discover, or get hold of, some sort of treasure. They are bringing it up the coast—it may be to Halifax or to some other port—that doesn't matter. But they are wrecked in the storm.

"Before that, however, there is a quarrel on board. Some man—maybe Black Beard—thinks he has a better right to the treasure than the others. He gets possession of it, jumps overboard to swim to shore—knowing it isn't far away—and is whanged on the head. We pick him up and carry him beyond high water until we can get help.

"Meanwhile, he revives and crawls off to hide with his treasure. But he's afraid to go further away

—say to some city where he could dispose of it—because he could easily be traced in some city, and out here, in the wild sand dunes, it isn't so easy. That's why Black Beard may be hiding here."

"Say, it sounds like the plot of a moving picture!" exclaimed Harry.

"It sure does!" agreed Ned. "But what is the treasure, Bob? Does your detective instinct go as far as that?"

Bob shook his head.

"Now you've got me," he admitted. "But I'm pretty sure of one thing—Black Beard has the treasure—whatever it is!"

"And where is it?" asked Harry, eagerly.

"Might be in this hut—as well as anywhere else," went on Bob. "It isn't likely that he'd carry it with him when he's scouting around the woods—too apt to lose it."

"Then you think the gold or pearls may be buried in this hut?" asked Ned.

"I'm not saying the treasure is gold or pearls," went on Bob, "but whatever it is, I think it's around here."

"Let's have a hunt for it!" suggested Harry.

Before either of his chums could answer, a sudden noise—the snapping of a stick—startled them.

"He's coming back!" excitedly whispered Ned.

"Come on!" begged Harry.

But Bob stood his ground.

"No one is coming," he stated. "That was only a loose tree branch falling." And so it proved—or at least it was some natural sound—not a noise presaging the approach of some one. Or, at any rate, Black Beard did not loom up.

"No," decided Bob, after thinking it over, "I don't believe we'd have any right to go in here and dig around, searching for a treasure. For the time being this is Black Beard's hut—he has occupied it and may claim it under squatter rights——"

"Whatever they are," interrupted Ned with a chuckle.

"Well, it just means that a man's house is his castle, so to speak," went on Bob. "If we had come here and fixed up this shack to live in, we wouldn't like it if some one ransacked it while we were out scouting for grub."

"That's right," chimed in Harry.

"But how are we going to find out what the treasure is?" asked Ned.

"We'll have to do it by strategy," decided Bob. "Listen, fellows, I've a sort of plan. Come on away and I'll tell you."

It was in the carrying out of this plan that Bob, the next day, might have been seen hiding under a hole beneath a tree stump, in a place where he had a good view of the lonely shack. He was there for all day, having with him food and water. And his hiding place was well concealed.

But though he had entered it after an observation which showed him the shack to be uninhabited, and though he had been there some hours, he had seen no signs of Black Beard. The mysterious sailor had not reappeared at the hut, though from certain signs about it Bob was certain the man had been there between the first visit of the three chums, and the return of the young detective.

"I wonder if he's ever coming back?" mused Bob to himself as he made himself as comfortable as possible in his hiding place. "I may have all my trouble for nothing. And yet he doesn't appear to have vamoosed for good—some of his stuff is still around."

This he had determined by looking at the hut through a pair of field glasses he had brought with him. He could get a good view without going too close.

"He hasn't been out to the wreck, to dive down and get any treasure that may be there," decided Bob. He and his chums had learned, on inquiring at the life saving station when they returned the evening before, that diving operations were to go on the next day—the sea having been too rough for work during the daylight hours when Bob and his chums had been visiting the government wireless experiment station.

They had told Mr. Wendy about the magnetic currents that put out his light and interfered with his

thermostat, and the light keeper was delighted to know that he wasn't at fault. An inspector had come down, and he was going to visit the wireless station.

So one mystery at Beacon Beach had been cleared up, thanks to Bob Dexter's detective abilities.

"But there is still the mystery of the wreck—and this queer Black Beard," said Bob to himself, hiding in the stump hole.

He was almost dozing off—it was late in the afternoon—when he suddenly heard a noise in the direction of the hut. Quickly he crept to the edge of his hole and looked out.

"There he is!" he whispered.

He saw the rugged and unkempt figure of Black Beard entering the hut. The man carried some ears of corn and other garden produce. He had, evidently, been out scouting for food.

"Now to see if my trick will work," murmured Bob.

The young detective had not progressed thus far in his solution of the mystery without having made some well-founded plans. Of course he realized that his plans might miscarry—as the plans of a better equipped sleuth might do. But Bob had hopes.

"If the thing works the way I think it will, I can go on a step farther," he told himself. "If it

doesn't—well, I'll just have to start over again—that's all."

Before trying his little trick, the lad went over again in his mind many points. He was checking up on them to discover, if possible, where there was a flaw. But he could not seem to locate one.

"Anyhow, there's no harm done if this doesn't work," he mused. "I'm playing safe, any way you look at it. But I would like this to turn out the way I think it will."

He took a long breath and looked about him. Everything seemed to be quiet.

"Now for it!" murmured the lad.

Making of his hands a megaphone, he yelled in a loud voice:

"All hands on deck to shorten sail!"

It was a fairly good imitation of the voice of a captain or mate calling for help from his hands in a storm.

Almost immediately out of the hut rushed Black Beard, and in his hands he carried a small, black box.

"He's got it! He's got it!" cried Bob, and with a shout he leaped from the hole and rushed toward the bewildered Nate Simpson.

CHAPTER XXIV

UP FROM THE WRECK

HARRY and Ned, left in camp when Bob had departed to spy out the actions of Black Beard, had found time hanging rather heavily on their hands, after their chum had left.

"What'll we do?" asked Harry, when the place had been "slicked up," following an early breakfast.

"Want to go for a swim?" asked Ned.

"Too cold!"

"It is a bit chilly," agreed Ned. "Well, what say we go down and see if Mr. Wendy's light apparatus is working all right?"

"Can't tell, until after dark. But let's go down, anyhow. He asked us to come again, when we told him, last night, how the magnetic wireless current had been playing high jinks with his thermostat."

"And it might be," added Ned, "that Mrs. Wendy would again invite us to partake of some of her famous doughnuts."

"Not hungry again; are you?" asked Harry.

"Well, we had a pretty early breakfast," stated Ned. Which was the truth, for Bob had wanted

to get in his hiding place by daybreak. "I could manage to eat again if some one forced it on me."

"Guess I'm in the same boat," admitted his chum. "Come on."

They were made welcome at the lighthouse where the keeper, in company with the government inspector, who had arrived from Washington the day before, and Mr. Blake from the wireless station, were going over the apparatus, and checking up on results, both negative and positive.

Nor were the lads mistaken in the predicted conduct of dear old Mrs. Wendy. For she had a batch of crisp, brown doughnuts, just out of the oven, and, naturally——

Well, you can guess what followed, so what's the use of me wasting time telling you.

Sufficient to say that Ned and Harry went away from the lighthouse residence feeling much better, and much fuller, so to speak, than when they entered.

It was growing on toward noon, but they decided they would not need to eat until some time later, thanks to the feed of doughnuts and milk.

They strolled down the beach toward the life saving station, being spoken to by several of Captain Hanford's men, and then Jim Hart called:

"Why is it you aren't out at the wreck?"

"Is the diver going down?" asked Ned, eagerly.

"Sure he is! He an' Cap. Blackford are all out at the wreck."

"Let's go, Harry!" proposed Ned, eagerly. "It will pass away the time until Bob gets back."

"All right."

They ran around to the cove and jumped into their boat, and were soon pulling out toward what remained of the *Sea Hawk*. The wreck had shifted her position—the boys could see that—due, they supposed, to the heavy sea that had been running the day before, and to a strong north east wind.

"She'll break up pretty soon, I guess," ventured Ned, pulling one oar, while Harry managed the other.

"Shouldn't wonder," was the answer. "But the sea's calm enough now."

"It sure is."

At the wreck was the diver's boat, with its air pump, its coils of rope, air hose and the like, and a smaller craft. The diver's helpers were getting him ready to make a descent.

In the other boat was Captain Blackford, Joe Norton and some of the reputed owners of the *Sea Hawk* and her cargo, whatever that might be.

"If we get up my chest, that's all I care about," Captain Blackford was saying, in rather a loud voice, Ned and Harry thought. "I've got a lot of papers in that—and some keepsakes."

"Yes, it's tough to lose keepsakes," chimed in Joe Norton. "I hope you can get it up," he added to the diver.

"I'll guarantee to slip a cable around it," was the man's reply, for he had not yet put on his helmet and thus could talk. "Getting it up will be your work."

"Oh, I'll do that all right—if you get a rope around that won't slip off," boasted Captain Blackford.

"I'm not in the habit of tying knots that slip," returned the diver, justifiable pride in his tones.

"They must be going to hoist up out of the wreck that box Bob saw when he dived down," whispered Ned to Harry.

"I guess so—yes. But didn't he say it was bolted fast—or held down in some way?"

"Yes, but the diver can loosen it. There, he's getting ready to go down."

The glass and copper helmet was adjusted, the front "window" was screwed into place and then the diver, with an extra rope fastened to his belt, in addition to a crowbar, a wrench and some other tools, went down over the side, and began descending on the short ladder.

His head disappeared beneath the surface of the sea, and a little train of air bubbles began to flow upward. From then on the boys could see nothing but what happened aboard the diver's boat—the work of the men at the air pump and the intent watchfulness of the man with the life line and hose in charge.

There was a period of eager and anxious waiting —not only on the part of the boys, but on the part of Captain Blackford and his seamates as well. For the late commander of the *Sea Hawk* was now observed nervously to be pacing up and down on board the flat deck of the barge-like boat which carried the diving apparatus.

"He's anxious, all right," remarked Harry.

"Sure," agreed Ned. "Wonder if there's any treasure in the old wreck?"

"There must be, or they wouldn't be in such a sweat to get that chest up."

More waiting. Many minutes passed. All that could be noted of the diver was the train of air bubbles that came ceaselessly up from the depths of the ocean—no great depth, to be sure, but deep enough.

At last Ned and Harry saw unusual activity among the diver's helpers. The man who had never let go the life line called:

"He's made fast! Come on and haul up!"

"Did you hear that?" asked Ned. "They're going to bring up the chest!"

"Yes," assented Harry. "Now we'll find out what all the mystery is about."

"Why isn't Bob here?" went on Ned. "He ought to be in on this!"

"Maybe he's caught Black Beard," whispered Harry.

"Maybe. Look, they're going to haul up now!"

Captain Blackford and his shipmates, including Joe Norton, could be seen heaving hard on a rope —it was the extra rope the diver had taken down into the sea with him.

And then, in a few minutes, there appeared above the surface of the waves the brass-bound chest Bob Dexter had observed when he dived and looked into the interior of the sunken *Sea Hawk*.

Up from the wreck was hauled the captain's chest!

"Oh, why isn't Bob here?" sighed Harry, and Ned echoed his regret.

Eagerly the two lads, steadying their small boat by holding to some outstanding parts of the wreck, looked at the chest as it was hauled on board the diver's boat.

What mystery would it reveal when opened?

"Bob ought to be here!" said Harry.

"He sure had," agreed his chum.

But it was just at this same, corresponding, time that Bob Dexter, springing from his hole beneath the big tree root, approached Black Beard and the mysterious box that ragged sailor had caught up, following the lad's strategic alarm. For Bob had played a trick—worked a bit of strategy, so to speak, on Nate Simpson.

For a moment man and boy confronted one another—Bob cool and collected, yet with his heart

beating high in hope of solving the remaining mystery of Beacon Beach—the black-bearded sailor of the wreck considerably excited, if looks told anything.

"What have you there?" suddenly demanded Bob. The question was on a par with the salutation usually given by professional detectives to suspects when they come upon them.

"Where are you going?" a police detective will suddenly demand, approaching from behind a man he wants to arrest, or one whom he suspects needs to be arrested.

"It never fails to throw them off their guard," a noted detective once told me. "They may blurt out the truth to you, but, anyhow, it shakes their nerve to be asked where they are going, and you've got 'em on the run."

Bob remembered this, and brought it into use in his own way. So, when the echo of the words, "What have you there?" rang in the ears of Black Beard, the man was taken off his guard.

He looked at the black box, which he had caught up from its hiding place in his hut, to run out with on the alarm being given—an alarm that meant much to him. He looked intently at the black box.

Then, suddenly, his nerve seemed to come back to him. He straightened up, looked boldly at Bob and demanded.

"Who are you—boy? What right you got coming here?"

"I'm after you—and that box," went on Bob with a smile. "I was one of those who picked you up when you were washed in from the sea. My chums and I carried you up in the dunes—we went to get the life savers to help you—but you'd disappeared. You've been hiding ever since.

"Now look here, Nate Simpson—don't you think it's about time to fight this thing out in the open? No use keeping in hiding. Captain Blackford is going to get his chest up from the wreck, and——"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the other, in a wild sort of way. "A lot of good it will do him to get that chest up! It's empty! Empty, I tell you! Empty! Ho! Ho! He'll be fooled!"

"Oh, his chest is empty, is it?" asked Bob. "Then I suppose you have the yellow boys there," and he pointed to the black box.

"Yellow boys! Yellow boys!" cried Black Beard, his eyes flashing. "Then you know! You—you——"

"Yes, I know," said Bob, easily. "Better come with me down to the station and square it up with the captain. Bring the yellow boys with you."

"No! No!" fiercely shouted the sailor. "I'll not give them up! They're mine! Mine, I tell you! I found them!"

For a moment or two he stood there, staring at

Bob. It was a tense moment. The young detective did not quite know what to do.

"You can't take this box away from me!" insisted the black-bearded man with a flashing look from his wild eyes.

"I'm not going to," said Bob, with a smile. It was better to be a bit crafty with this fellow, the lad thought.

"Then why do you come here demanding it?" was the question.

"You ought to know that as well as I do," spoke the lad.

"Supposing I do?"

There was a defiance in the man's manner.

"Well, then, if you do, what's the use of arguing?" asked Bob, though if he had been challenged he could not really have given a sound reason for asking the man to give up the box.

"Come along now—you might as well give up," said Bob soothingly, as though the end had been reached. "Come with me."

"No! No!" shouted Black Beard.

He started to run away—back into the woods—but his foot caught on a clinging vine, and he fell heavily as Bob sprang toward him.

CHAPTER XXV

THE YELLOW BOYS

Bob Dexter expected to have some sort of a fight with the black-bearded sailor who hugged so tightly to him the black box. But all the fight was taken out of Nate Simpson by his fall—in which he struck his head, reopening, it appeared later, the wound received just before he had been cast up on the beach in the storm.

In consequence it was a very weak and spiritless man with whom the young detective had to deal. Bob turned his quarry over—Nate had fallen on his face—and the black box slipped from his nerveless fingers.

"Now look here, old man," said Bob soothingly, when he saw that the sailor's eyes were opening and that he was recovering consciousness, "I'm not going to do you any harm. I'm not going to take the yellow boys away from you."

"You—aren't," slowly gasped the sailor as he raised himself slightly.

"No. All I want to do is to see this mystery solved. I want you to go back down to Captain

Blackford and straighten matters out. If you have robbed his chest you ought to give back to him what you took. That's only honest. Give up this hiding."

"But they're mine, I tell you!" insisted the man, and he snatched from Bob the black box.

"All right—maybe they are," admitted the lad. "They aren't mine—that's sure. Now quiet down and let's talk this thing over. But you're hurt—your head's bleeding."

"Yes, it does feel sort of queer," said the man faintly as he put his hand to his black, matted locks.

"Let me take a look at it," suggested Bob. "I know something of first aid."

He found some water in a tin can in the hut, and washed away the blood. The newest cut was only a small one, but it was in the same place as was a larger one—an ugly wound not yet perfectly healed. Bob bound it up as best he could, with a spare clean handkerchief from his pocket. And, having brought from a near-by spring a drink of water to the man, he asked:

"Will you come down to the life saving station with me?"

Nate Simpson hesitated a moment before replying, and then said:

"I guess I might as well. I can't hold out and fight 'em any longer. I knew they'd get the best of me—the yellow boys. Here, you take 'em," and he held the black box out to the lad.

"All right—we'll get the thing straightened out for you," said Bob, cheerfully. "I'll take you to our camp first, and make you some hot coffee. Can you eat anything?"

"Can I? Say, I'm half starved. I've lived mostly on raw vegetables since I've been hiding."

Meekly he followed Bob to camp. It was deserted, Ned and Harry being out at the wreck. The young detective quickly made some coffee, fried some bacon and eggs and set a meal before the wanderer, who ate it ravenously.

"Feel better now?" asked Bob, when the plate had been cleaned and the coffee cup three times drained.

"I sure do—a lot."

"Then come on!"

Just as Bob Dexter reached the beach near the life saving station with his charge, including the black box, the boats came ashore from the wreck, the surf being so gentle that they could all land on the open beach. Ned and Harry leaped out of their boat.

"Say—you've got him!" cried Ned, when he saw who was with Bob.

"Yes, this is Nate Simpson," said Bob, easily.

"And the—treasure—is that it?" cried Harry, pointing to the black box which Bob carried.

"Well, yes, I guess so," was the answer. "It's got yellow boys in."

"Yellow boys!" cried Joe Norton with a shrill laugh. "That's where the joke's on you, Nate! There are the yellow boys!" and he pointed to the captain's chest, which had been brought ashore in the boat, the diving scow remaining out at the wreck, though preparations were under way to move it—since the diver's work was ended.

Nate Simpson did not seem much distressed by this statement to the effect that he held an empty box, or, rather, that Bob held it for him. But Bob, himself, was somewhat disappointed.

"Isn't this a box of diamonds?" he asked Black Beard.

"Diamonds?" cried Ned.

"Diamonds!" echoed Harry. "I thought the treasure was gold—yellow boys."

"They're yellow boys, all right," declared Bob with a laugh, "but they are yellow diamonds—yellow diamonds from Brazil."

"Yellow diamonds—from Brazil," repeated Ned. "How do you know, Bob?"

"Oh, I sort of put two and two together. I knew yellow boys couldn't be gold from South America—there isn't any there to speak of. So I tried to reason out what the next most valuable yellow objects could be from there. Naturally I thought of Brazilian diamonds. They aren't as valuable as those from South Africa, of course, on account of their yellow color. But some people like 'em that way,

and there's a good market for the best of the big stones. That's what the yellow boys are, aren't they, Captain Blackford?" he asked, for the late commander of the *Sea Hawk* was landing from his boat containing his chest. "Yellow diamonds, aren't they?"

"Yes, though I must say you're pretty smart to guess it."

"Oh, Bob's a neat little detective, all right," complimented Ned.

"Detective!" gasped Joe Norton, and he flashed a quick look at the captain. "Detective!"

"Just an amateur one," Bob made haste to say, for he was very modest.

"Oh, then you aren't connected with the government then?" and there was a lot of relief in the captain's voice.

"No," laughed Bob, "I'm not connected with the government."

"But I am!" suddenly exclaimed a voice, and from the group of life savers stepped a man—a man with steely blue eyes that seemed to pierce through one—a man that Bob and his chums had observed at the wireless station—Mr. Jackson, in other words.

"I'm from the United States Secret Service," went on Mr. Jackson, flashing a badge on the underside of his coat lapel. "And I take you three men into custody for smuggling diamonds into this country in violation of the customs law. You're under arrest,

Frank Chase, alias Captain Blackford, and you also, Jack Turner, alias Joe Norton. As for you, Simpson, I think you're more a dupe of these men than anything else, but I must do my duty. You, also, are under arrest."

"But they're my yellow boys, I tell you—my diamonds!" insisted Black Beard. "I took care of the old Spaniard and he gave them to me. They're mine, I tell you. Here—I'll show you!"

He caught the black box from Bob's unresisting hand and, with a quick motion, pressed some hidden spring, it seemed, so that the cover flew back.

And then, to the gaze of all was revealed—some coarse yellow pebbles—pebbles such as might be picked up on the beach!

There was a gasp of surprise, not only from Bob and his chums, but from Nate Simpson as well.

"Why—why—" he stammered. "Why——"

"You've been double-crossed," said Detective Jackson in a low voice. "The yellow Brazilian diamonds are in that chest," and he pointed to the one that had so recently been hauled up from the wreck of the *Sea Hawk*. "I'll take charge of that," he went on. "And now will you men submit quietly, or shall I have to use these?" and he took from his pocket jangling, shiny handcuffs.

"We know when we're licked," said Captain Blackford, grimly. "We'll knuckle under. Though how you got on to us, and how you knew, my lad,

that we had Brazilian diamonds, is more than I can fathom," and he looked sharply at Bob Dexter.

"My part was easy enough!" laughed Bob. "I just figured it out."

"And as for my part—well, the Secret Service doesn't give away its secrets," spoke Detective Jackson grimly. "Take that chest up to your station, Captain Hanford, if you please," he requested the life saver, "and keep it safe. I'll arrange to have these men locked up."

"We can give bail—can't we?" asked Captain Blackford. "It isn't any terrible crime to smuggle diamonds."

"Oh, no, I haven't any hard feelings against you," said Mr. Jackson. "You can be bailed—of course, all three of you. At worst you'll only be fined, and the diamonds confiscated, unless you want to pay the double duty on them."

"I don't believe we do," said Joe Norton, with a sickly laugh. "The jig's up, but we got the best of you, Nate Simpson."

Just how he figured that out, when he was under arrest with the small treasure in the shape of the diamonds confiscated, was hard to understand. But he may have only been boasting to hear himself talk.

"Well, I guess this is the end of the Beacon Beach mystery," remarked Bob when, a little later, the men had been released on bail, which was furnished by a representative of a surety company, summoned

by some of Captain Blackford's companions—who had arrived after the wreck.

"Looks like it—and you certainly did your share in solving it," complimented Harry.

"How did you get Black Beard to give up the box?" asked Ned.

"Well, I figured out that he had it hidden somewhere in that hut, but it might have taken me a month to find it. I reasoned that if I could scare him into running out that he wouldn't run until he had picked up what he thought was the treasure, and bring it out with him.

"So I gave a sudden shout, about getting in sail. He reacted to it, as I thought he would, and, taking the black box from its hiding place, rushed out with it. He nearly got away from me, after all, though, but he tripped and hurt his head. After that it was easy."

"And did he think he had the diamonds, all the while?" asked Harry.

"I reckon he did," replied Bob. "I don't know much about the trouble on the *Sea Hawk,* though. Maybe Mr. Jackson will tell us."

The Secret Service man was very willing to tell the boys as much of the story as he was allowed to make public. He complimented Bob, not only on his work in solving the lighthouse mystery, but also on his trick in getting the secret from Nate Simpson.

"I can't tell you boys how we agents get tips of

diamonds and other valuables that are about to be smuggled in," he said. "Sufficient to say that I got word of a large quantity of Brazilian diamonds that were on their way up from Rio Janeiro and were likely to be brought in to some lonely spot on this coast."

"But they were going to Halifax," said Ned. "That's a British port, and you couldn't act there."

"Halifax was only a blind," said the detective. "The *Sea Hawk* was coming somewhere along here. But the storm was something they didn't count on. It spoiled all their plans. And of course I didn't know anything about the quarrel between Captain Blackford and his mate on one side, and Black Beard, as you call him, on the other.

"It must have been, though, that these criminals, like others, fell out, and one tried to double-cross the other. Simpson may be telling the truth when he says he was instrumental in getting the diamonds —or he may not. I'm not going into that.

"At any rate, once on board the diamonds were put in the captain's chest, which was locked to the floor. Perhaps Simpson managed to steal the diamonds and, in their place substituted the pebbles in the black box. Then, later on, the diamonds may have been stolen from him, put in the chest, and his black box filled with valueless stones. If this was done he couldn't have been aware of it.

"Then came the storm and the wreck. Simpson,

wishing to escape with what he thought were the diamonds, jumped overboard with his black box. What happened him you know as well as I. Probably he didn't dare make his get-away with what he thought were the diamonds, when he knew his mates were watching for him."

"But if Blackford and Norton knew Simpson only had worthless pebbles in his box, why were they so anxious to get in touch with him?" asked Harry. "Why didn't they let him go, and not bother with him?"

"I think the answer to that," said the Secret Service man, "is that they feared, when Simpson discovered he hadn't the diamonds, that he would inform against them, and they would be arrested. That's the way when criminals fall out—one 'squeals' on the other. But in this case Simpson didn't open his box—he thought, all the while, that he had the diamonds, and was watching his chance to escape with them. I think, also, that only Blackford really knew where the diamonds were—even Norton didn't know for sure."

Later this was found to be the explanation. Nate Simpson's conduct was very strange—even Bob admitted this. But when it was explained that, even before the wreck, he had been an odd character, little was thought of his actions.

Black Beard, it was learned, had sprung over the side and had swam ashore with his box of "dia-

monds" as he thought, just as the *Sea Hawk* struck. The refugee had been hurt, and nearly drowned. He had come to, as surmised, and had crawled off when the boys went to get help for him. After that he remained in hiding in the old hut he discovered. He was out of his head at times, and lived on what he could take from farms and gardens. How it was he never opened the black box, to discover he had only worthless pebbles instead of diamonds, was never learned.

But little remains to be told. Detective Jackson sent the seized diamonds to the New York customs house, where it was found that their value was considerable, though probably they did not represent the great fortune Captain Blackford had hoped for.

As for the smugglers—or, rather, would-be smugglers—they "jumped their bail," the securities deposited being forfeited. But this, Detective Jackson said, was no more than he expected.

"Very likely, if I had haled those fellows before the judge, there would have been other charges against them," he said. "They were a rare lot—you did a good thing, Bob Dexter, in bringing them to justice."

"Oh, I didn't do so much," replied the lad. "After all, you were working on the case ahead of me."

"Yes, but that's my business. With you it was

only a side issue, yet you had the matter sized up almost as well as I had myself."

"Well, I thought there must be something of value in the wreck, when I noticed how Captain Blackford was hanging around," admitted Bob. "At first I thought he had a gang on shore playing tricks with the lighthouse beacon. But that was altogether a different story."

"Different mystery, you mean," corrected Ned.

"And you solved 'em both," added Harry.

The boys were back in camp, Detective Jackson having called by invitation to spend the day with them.

"Yes, Bob Dexter is some little detective," admitted the Secret Service man. "What are you going to tackle next?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Bob, with a laugh.

But I am privileged to tell you, and the next activities of the young sleuth will be related in the following volume of this series to be called "Bob Dexter and the Storm Mountain Mystery; or, The Secret of the Log Cabin."

"You surely aren't going to give up a work for which you seem to be peculiarly fitted, are you?" asked Mr. Jackson.

"Well, I don't know," and Bob seemed diffident and uncertain. "My uncle doesn't think much of this way of making a living."

"You can make a living at it, and a good living,

too," said the Secret Service man. "I'm not saying you will get to be a millionaire. If there was that chance I'd have been one long ago. But money isn't everything."

"That's right," agreed Bob.

"There's a satisfaction in doing a thing well," went on the other, "that can only come after you've worked hard and succeeded where there didn't appear to be a chance. That's half the fun."

"I know it," assented Bob, with shining eyes. "That's what keeps me at it."

"Then don't give up," advised the other.

"Bob isn't that kind," commented Ned. "He's the best little sticker you ever saw."

"That's right," added Harry.

"Well, I think I'll be going," remarked Mr. Jackson, rising from a comfortable seat in the shade.

"Better stay to grub," invited Bob. "It's Harry's turn to cook. He burns water fairly well."

"Get out, you old sea-dog!" laughed Harry. "I've got fried chicken, if anybody should ask you."

"Hurray!" shouted Detective Jackson with a jolly, boyish laugh. "Then I sure will stay!"

And so, leaving the merry party in the camp at Beacon Beach, we will, for the time being, take leave of Bob Dexter, to meet him again in the next book.

THE END

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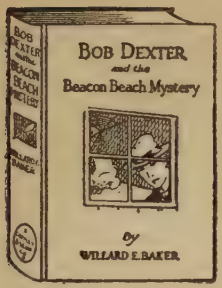

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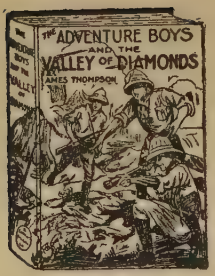

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